



THE RAVEN

5

ANARCHIST QUARTERLY

GEORGE WOODCOCK on

Raven: the Prometheus of the Canadian Indians

CLIFFORD HARPER's illustrations
to Kenneth Rexroth's Bestiary

CAROLINE ROBERTSON on Victor B Neuburg

BRIAN RICHARDSON on Modern Architecture

COLIN WARD on the Thinner City

GEORGE WALFORD on the Source of Anarchism

L SUSAN BROWN on Anarchism and Human Nature

THE SPIES FOR PEACE after 25 years

8 pages of illustrations

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Editorial

The Raven flies, rather slowly but still surely, into its second year — slightly wounded in one wing, yet at the same time showing some fine new feathers as it goes.

Our original cover design has been replaced with a new one by Donald Rooum. George Woodcock, who accepted the publication of our critical article on his work in an earlier issue in his characteristically Godwinian spirit, returns with a fascinating note in this issue on the ambiguous character of Raven in the mythology of the Indians of Western Canada. (The illustration on the cover shows a totem pole from Kayang on Queen Charlotte Island, British Columbia, acquired by the British Museum in 1903; the top figure represents Raven disguised as a chief, and the one below is Raven in his own guise.) We wonder what other characteristics are displayed by Raven elsewhere in the world. George Woodcock has also contributed a long essay on anarchism which will appear in a forthcoming issue.

We have always wanted to publish some new creative work — whether verbal or visual — as well as all the theoretical and critical and historical material. Here Cliff Harper contributes illustrations for eight of the seventeen poems in Kenneth Rexroth's sequence *A Bestiary*. This was written by the American libertarian poet for his daughters, Mary and Katherine, and published in his collection *In Defense of the Earth* (1956). We hope that Cliff Harper will provide the same exquisite service for the other nine poems in the near future.

We have also wanted to publish some material by and about women. The total absence of women from our first volume was noted by several readers, and in reply to their questions we could only answer that this was purely fortuitous. It simply happened during our first year that none of the contributions we were offered was by women and that none of the women we asked for contributions provided any. (We should add that during the same period women were responsible for the cover design, almost all the type-setting, much of the proof-reading, and all the make-up.) However, we have changed all that, and we begin now with two articles by women.

One is an account of the libertarian poet and editor Victor B. Neuburg by Caroline Robertson, who is his granddaughter as well as

his biographer. The other is an analysis of some anarchist views of human nature from a feminist and existentialist position by L. Susan Brown of the Canadian anarcho-feminist paper *Kick It Over* — based perhaps on a rather narrow reading of anarchist literature but illuminating and stimulating. With the latter goes George Walford's equally illuminating and stimulating inquiry into where anarchists and anarchism actually come from in human society. Such issues are crucial to any serious discussion of the anarchist ideology, and we hope to have more such contributions.

We have another talk by Colin Ward, who won the first Charles Douglas-Home Award and is now studying the problems of the so-called inner city. And we have a consideration of the appalling state of modern architecture by Brian Richardson, in preparation for his account in a future issue of one attempt to improve it.

Finally we have a long account of the Spies for Peace after 25 years, which will presumably remain the definitive version for the foreseeable future. This episode has tended to be forgotten as the memories of the old Nuclear Disarmament movement are overshadowed by the rise and fall of the new one, and is worth rescuing from oblivion. As it happens, the latest history of the old movement — Richard Taylor's *Against the Bomb* (Oxford University Press, 1988) — gives a fairly long and largely accurate account of the episode (based on earlier versions of the same material), ending with a curious conclusion: 'Within its own terms of reference, the "Spies for Peace" organized an audacious, efficient, and original operation. At one level it remained, therefore, an autonomous political act, perfect and complete in itself.' Surely the whole point of the operation was precisely that it was not complete in itself but was a practical model of do-it-yourself libertarian action which could be extended and followed — as indeed it was then, and still is now.



Cat

There are too many poems
About cats. Beware of cat
Lovers, they have a hidden
Frustration somewhere and will
Stick you with it if they can.



Fox

The fox is very clever.
In England people dress up
Like a movie star's servants
And chase the fox on horses.
Rather, they let dogs chase him,
And they come along behind.
When the dogs have torn the fox
To pieces they rub his blood
On the faces of young girls.
If you are clever do not
Let anybody know it,
But especially Englishmen.



Goat

G stands for goat and also
For genius. If you are one,
Learn from the other, for he
Combines domestication,
Venerary, and independence.



Man

Someday, if you are lucky,
You'll each have one for your own.
Try it before you pick it.
Some kinds are made of soybeans.
Give it lots to eat and sleep.
Treat it nicely and it will
Always do just what you want.



Trout

The trout is taken when he
Bites an artificial fly.
Confronted with fraud, keep your
Mouth shut and don't volunteer.



Uncle Sam

Like the unicorn, Uncle
Sam is what is called a myth.
Plato wrote a book which is
An occult conspiracy
Of gentlemen pederasts.
In it he said ideas
Are more nobly real than
Reality, and myths
Help keep people in their place.
Since you will never become,
Under any circumstances,
Gentlemen pederasts you'd
Best leave these blood-soaked notions
To those who find them useful.



Unicorn

The unicorn is supposed
To seek a virgin, lay
His head in her lap, and weep,
Whereupon she steals his horn.
Virginity is what is
Known as a privation. It is
Very difficult to find
Any justification for
Something that doesn't exist.
However, in your young days
You might meet a unicorn.
There are not many better
Things than a unicorn horn.



Wolf

Never believe all you hear.
Wolves are not as bad as lambs.
I've been a wolf all my life,
And have two lovely daughters
To show for it, while I could
Tell you sickening tales of
Lambs who got their just deserts.

* * *

George Woodcock

Raven: The Prometheus of the Indians

Most peoples have culture heroes, and usually they are men. But in the land where I live, Canada beyond the Rockies, the culture heroes have belonged to the animal world. Among the Coastal Indian tribes the great mythical figure is Raven, and among the tribes of the Interior it is Coyote. In real life both of them are intelligent, resourceful, mischievous creatures; the coyote is the hardest mammal of all to catch in a trap, while, as the *Audubon Guide to North American Birds* remarks, the raven 'seems to apply reasoning in situations entirely new to it'. Given such qualities, it is inevitable that these creatures should acquire important roles in the mythology of the Western Canadian peoples. In this note, which is written to acquaint the editors and readers of *The Raven* with the company they keep, I am concerned mainly with Raven, who plays a greater part than any other creature in the mythology that underlies the great artistic traditions of the Coastal peoples of British Columbia and southern Alaska.

Raven really has two roles in Coast Indian mythology. On one level, as an anthropomorphised creature rather like the animal figures in European fables, he is the Trickster, acting on a larger scale the role the raven appears to assume in real life, playing tricks on the other animals, and sometimes getting the best and sometimes the worst of it. Is Raven as Trickster an exemplum of anarchism? A Stirnerite egoist, perhaps, but nothing more.

But there is a level in which Raven moves, in the myths of the Coast, from the role of Trickster to that of Transformer. In this role Raven was a central figure in the shamanistic beliefs which these Indians shared with the peoples of Siberia on the other shore of the North Pacific. Shamanism is really a kind of magical pre-religion. In post-magical religions, man is seen as subordinate to the supernatural powers, and the animal world is seen as subordinate to man, according to that appalling verse in *Genesis* where Jehovah gives to Adam 'dominion over the fish of the sea and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth'.

The Indian shamans had no such homocentric concept of life on this earth. Men and animals lived in a kind of undefined ecosystem in which they were interdependent, predator needing prey, and prey providing

for predator. Animals were respected; they had their spiritual as well as physical forms, and on that level they could transform themselves into beings of human appearance. Men indeed were often represented as inferior animals who — except for shamans — had lost the power of self-transformation.

Transformation was central to the orally transmitted doctrines of shamanism. The shaman went through visionary experiences in which, in a state of trance, he was supposed to be literally remade by spirits, transformed limb for limb and cell for cell, emerging as a twice-born being endowed with powers and skills that liberated him from ordinary necessity. Having been transformed, the shaman could transform himself indefinitely; he could also, in defiance of whatever power controlled the universe, transform his environment.

The concept of transformation ran through the whole culture of the Coast Indian tribes. People had their spirit patrons, usually animals in supernatural form, whom they had encountered in solitary trances in the wilderness, or whom they had inherited through the ranked lineages of the tribes; and when a man or a woman put on the appropriate mask, as Raven or Eagle, Bear or Hawk or Killer-whale, danced the appropriate dance and sang the appropriate song, he or she was temporarily transformed into the supernatural patron. Even the masks were constructed as transformation pieces, parted at an appropriate moment by hidden strings to reveal, within the opened head of Raven or Hawk, a spirit countenance or the rayed face of the Sun, while the winter festivals of the Kwakiutl tribe, with their complex shamanist ceremonials, were carried on with a bewildering series of illusionist devices, all aimed at revealing the uncertain nature of appearance, and the way the natural and the supernatural realms, the animal and the human worlds, constantly interpenetrate.

Raven was the great Transformer, constantly assuming unexpected forms, to the extent that when the white-sailed ships of the Spaniards appeared off the shores of Alaska, the Tlingits of the area believed at first that these strange and apparently winged apparitions were yet other manifestations of the great Transformer, Raven appearing in a new disguise.

In the cosmology of the Pacific Coast Indians the idea of a benevolent deity had no place. They had much less sense of a creative Great Spirit or Manitou than the Ojibwa or Iroquois of Eastern Canada, and indeed no uniform or very well defined concepts of creation, while whatever beings did rather nebulously rule the heavens and earth were seen as no more benign than life itself, and indeed, rather like the Demiurge of the Gnostics or the Zeus of the Greeks, as somewhat malevolent, often

keeping from lesser beings the very gifts that might ease their lives and bring them a modicum of happiness.

Such gifts arrived most often through the Prometheus-like Transformers, always seen as animal spirits whose actions benefited other living beings. The legend of the Coast Salish tells how in the beginning, because a Seagull spirit had abducted Daylight, the people all lived in a permanent dusk, having to use torches constantly to see where they went. But Raven, by cunning, liberated Daylight, and the whole world was flooded with his illumination. The Haida legend is more grandiose, for it gives Raven a limited creator role in shaping the earth.

In the beginning [as James Dean told in a late nineteenth-century account of Haida myths] Raven brooded over intense darkness which, after ages of beating with his wings, he beat down into solid earth. After the earth became solid, the light on its surface was dim and misty, so, in order to light up the new globe, Raven travelled far and wide seeking some means to do it. During his travels he heard of a chief, who lived far away, and had the sun, moon and stars in three separate boxes.

Raven eventually found the chief, who refused to release the heavenly bodies. So Raven transformed himself into an attractive youth, with whom the chief's daughter fell in love, and eventually, after elaborate manoeuvres, the couple managed to get the sun and the moon and the stars into their possession, and Raven 'placed them on high, where they have been ever since, giving light to the world'. In other legends Raven is said to have actually stolen the sun, and on some of the exquisitely carved wooden rattles of the Tsimshian he is shown with the sun held like a cherry in his beak.

Some legends also credit Raven with stealing fire for humanity, though there is a fine Interior Salish tale of how this was done by Eagle and Beaver, combining their skills of flight and swimming. And there are many other discoveries and innovations that are attributed to Raven just as by the Greeks they were attributed to the Titan Prometheus.

Yet Raven and his fellow Transformer, Coyote, were always ambivalent creatures, since it was only by cunning that they secured the gifts they passed on to other beings, and here they resembled another Greek culture hero, Odysseus. In other ways they seemed to retain the rapacious nature of ordinary ravens and coyotes, seeking always to gain an advantage over the other animals. Nobody ever believed that their Prometheus-like feats were motivated by benevolence; they were carried out for the excitement that success would bring, and if anyone benefited that was merely a lucky bonus for which the Transformers might exact their price. Essentially, Raven was on the grand scale the shaman pitting his knowledge, his skills and his insolence against the

impersonal forces of the universe, and tricking them into accepting his will.

How much in all this makes Raven an appropriate mascot for an anarchist magazine? He is always, in his own way, Lucifer, concerned with bringing the light and dispelling the darkness. Whatever his motives, he is never seen on the side of the powers that be, whatever they are, but carries on a perpetual trickster's war against their pretensions. With true existentialist vigour he measures himself against the universe, and wins as often as he is defeated. He personifies rejection of what is, the true rebel stance. He is, like Satan, like Prometheus, a rebel hero. But it takes more to make an anarchist. We must not forget that, like Prometheus, he was the mental construct of a society that upheld slavery. All historical parallels have their limits, and this as much as any other.



W.C. Owen with Vickybird and his family on a picnic

Caroline Robertson

A Poet Among the Anarchists

In 1926 the veteran anarchist W. C. Owen went to live in Sussex, at The Sanctuary, Storrington. This refuge for those keen to live in artistic freedom what has come in our day to be known as 'the good life' was run by Vera Pragnell (later Vera Dennis Earle). Among those who constantly visited The Sanctuary was the poet Victor B. Neuburg, known to most of his friends as 'Vickybird'.

Victor Benjamin Neuburg (1883-1940) came from a middle-class Jewish background in London. He appears to have early lost the faith in which he was brought up, and was remembered by contemporaries at the City of London School as already a 'freethinking' boy. When he left school he entered the family business (Jacobs, Young & Westbury, Cane Importers), and while working there he discovered *The Freethinker* and *The Agnostic Journal*. His literary career began with the publication of poetry in both of them in 1903. He wrote a considerable amount of poetry and a number of articles for the *Agnostic Journal* until it closed down in 1907 soon after the death of its editor William Stewart Ross (known as Saladin); his association with *The Freethinker* was lifelong.

In 1906 Vickybird entered Trinity College, Cambridge, to read modern and medieval languages. He became a member of the Cambridge Freethought Association. While he was at Cambridge his first book of poems, *A Green Garland*, was published in 1908. It was at Cambridge, too, that he met Aleister Crowley, then the best-known Occultist in Britain. Like a number of other young men and women, Vickybird was dominated by Crowley, and the involvement was one from which he never recovered psychologically. He severed his connection with Crowley in 1914, and after a nervous breakdown joined the Army Service Corps in 1916 and was sent to France. Invalided out of the army in 1919, he, with an old friend and an aunt, founded the Vine Press at the aunt's house, Vine Cottage, Steyning, near Brighton.

In 1921 Vickybird married Kathleen Rose Goddard, and in 1924 they had a son, Victor, always called Toby. During his eleven years in Steyning, Vickybird continued to write poetry, most of which was published anonymously in a variety of journals. He published a number

of articles on bygone Sussex which appeared over his name in the same journals. The Vine Press published only two books of verse entirely by Vickybird, but other work by him appeared in two anonymous anthologies. Apart from this, the Vine Press published a number of works of poetry and prose by a variety of writers. It effectively closed down in 1930, lingering on in name only, although it did publish once more, in 1848, a play entitled *Wax* by Runia MacLeod.

Vickybird was a man of humanist and libertarian persuasion. For a time he had taken the anarchist paper *Freedom*. It was not surprising that he and Owen found so much in common and became great friends. During the last years of his life, Owen spent much time at Vine Cottage with Vickybird and his family. Owen became a much-loved family friend and is recalled with great affection by Toby at a distance of some sixty years. Photographs show Owen at tea in the Vine Cottage garden and with Vickybird at The Sanctuary. In his obituary of Owen, Vickybird wrote: 'He never failed me as a man, friend, helper, or colleague. . . . He adored children and animals, who returned his love' (*Freedom Bulletin*, September 1929). Called 'Uncle Owen' by the family, he effected a change in Vickybird's life, moving him from passive to active support of anarchism, in his own inimitable style.

On 14 July 1926, Owen wrote to Thomas Keell, editor of *Freedom*: *Freedom* came yesterday. . . . I should be glad if you could let me have half a dozen copies. . . . It would be well, I think, to send [it] to Victor Neuburg, Vine Cottage, Steyning, Sussex. He is a poet and writer of some ability and used to read *Freedom*. I think I have stirred him up, as also his wife. . . . His position is that nothing can save this situation, and that the sooner it goes to smash the better. . . .

Keell is of course an important figure in the annals of anarchism. He was both little known and 'often misrepresented [but] helped to keep *Freedom* going through its most eventful years', in the words of the article about him in the centenary edition of *Freedom* (October 1986). Between 1903 and 1932, and again between 1936 and his death in 1938, his name was identified with the paper. *Freedom* closed in 1927, but between 1928 and 1932 he published fifteen issues of the *Freedom Bulletin*. Although opponents began a rival *Freedom* in 1930 they were eventually replaced by those more sympathetic to his own ideas — Vickybird among them. And in 1936 Keell was the publisher of the new paper *Spain and the World*.

Keell evidently complied with Owen's request, and Vickybird took the paper again. Owen died in 1929, and Vickybird, who had kept Keell in touch with the progress of Owen's illness, wrote an appreciation of him for *Freedom Bulletin* which appeared immediately after Keell's own obituary of Owen (September 1929). Vickybird also

wrote an account of the funeral in *The Commonweal* (20 July 1929) and an obituary which appeared in *The Middleton Guardian* (29 July 1929).

Vickybird's correspondence with Keell was in large part about Owen, but also displayed a fervent wish to maintain contact with Keell himself:

Poor old Owen, our beloved friend, is dying by inches; he does not realise, I think, how ill he is; he wants you to write to Emma Goldman telling her of his condition. I saw our dear friend today. . . . There is nothing to be done except visit him. He likes that.

I'd like to see you again, soon, dear sir, we should remain in touch. (26 June 1929)

On 5 July 1929 Vickybird wrote to tell Keell of Owen's death, and ended the brief note by saying: 'You will keep in touch with us?' And on July 15 he wrote:

I am sending my account of our dearest old friend to *The Commonweal*; and a copy to the *Middleton Guardian*, to supplement, maybe, your own. I know you'll agree.

Thine ever, V. B. N.

Kathleen sent Keell a copy of Owen's will, in her own hand, in which he left the Neuburgs his dog Nell, and £20 as 'some slight return for the kindness they have shown me'.

In 1930 Vickybird left Steyning, his wife and son, and moved to London to live with Sheila MacLeod, known as Runia. They remained together until the end of his life, and it was their joint effort which later produced the little magazine *Comment*. A few months after his move, *Freedom* (New Series) began publication and continued to appear for six years. This period was the worst that British anarchism had known since the 1890s, seeing as it did the Depression and the formation of the National Government in Britain, and the rise of Hitler and Stalin abroad. Vickybird welcomed the appearance of the rival *Freedom*, despite his friendship with Keell, and he was from the outset a frequent contributor. The editor at this time was Keell's bitter enemy, Ambrose G. Barker.

Vickybird's first article appeared in the first two issues, in May and June 1930. It was a short piece, interesting in that it discussed the relationship between doctrinaire thought and the ideal of liberty which Vickybird felt to be particularly important. It is worth quoting in full:

The New Anarchism

The demarcations of our times, the increasing fissures in the body politic, the furrows that the necessities of our Age are ploughing in society, are indicative, so it seems to many philosophical observers, of a broadening rift between the few dominants and the many dominated.

The herd-instinct of mankind, seemingly ineradicable, is naturally used by

the dominants to their advantage. Leaders will never lack while soldiers are cheap. It is good, I think, that with the revival of *Freedom* we should see — or try to see — where we stand. It will also be good to ask ourselves if the Anarchist doctrine be practical politics, or if it be a dream to be realised only in a future state of society.

It is interesting also to the philosophic observer to watch how the anaemic-gutted 'reformers' of our day insist upon the infallibility of the panaceas that they would force upon us.

Be it noted, all these panaceas are bourgeois in their origin, outlook, and aims. Not one of them goes to the root of the matter; all of them are run by intellectuals, most of whom derive their knowledge from books and doctrines, and very nearly all of whom are subordinated by a subjective réchauffé of varying, more or less ill-digested, dogmas that have never been vitally co-ordinated.

One can think of half a dozen schemes of reform, each of which is claimed by its devotees to be the one certain and infallible cure for all our human and social ills; and the few of us who retain some vestiges of a comprehensive philosophy are scarcely to be blamed if we regard these positive doctrinaires as conscious or unconscious quacks.

It is here — and right here — that philosophic Anarchism has a word to say; it is here and now that we are so bold as to re-state what seems to us the truth underlying the anarchist doctrine.

Let us say at once that we hold the Anarchist teaching to be fitted only for the few. The ordinary bourgeois or violently anti-bourgeois reformer, a parvenu in philosophic speculation, insists on putting all his intellectual capital on one mental horse. Through lack of vision he cannot see beyond his nose; and he talks as if he had a permanent cold in his head, caused by the mental fogs that infest the dreary intellectual suburbs wherein his mind dwells.

We will re-affirm here our belief that social salvation is not to be found in neo-catholicism, in credit-control, in birth-control, in Atheism, in positivism, in the abolition of landlordism, in state socialism, in communism, or in any other partial reform that is claimed by its narrow-brained devotees to be the sole and exclusive gateway to the social heaven.

We maintain that ultimately the social heaven — like all the other heavens — will be found to be subjective; in other words, it is not more 'reformers' that we need, but more people who are capable of adjusting themselves to new social conditions. In a word, what we need is Independence — independence of thought, of idea, of ideal, of outlook.

It is just here and now that the Anarchist ethic comes in. The Anarchist contribution to the common stock of thought is just this ideal of independence. Let our motto be: Goats, Not Sheep. What we need is the Dionysian spirit, that anti-bourgeois, anti-flat, anti-conventional spirit that is willing to test, to experiment, to dare, on behalf of the Ego, and by means of the Ego for the ultimate benefit of society.

The dangers attendant upon this idea are great, many, and — happily — obvious. Independent action is not enough, unless it be informed by wisdom. Rashness, violence, vehemence, fanaticism, are useless by themselves, ending

merely in the destruction of the individual, and in the degradation of the ideal of independent action. Neither thought nor action will suffice by itself; both 'reformism', which is mere thought, and individual violence, which is mere dispersion of force, are by themselves useless. If the reader doubt this, let him recall the history of State-Socialism in all the countries in Europe where it has been established, and the history of those hapless heroes who have sacrificed themselves upon the altar of individual violence. There is something else needed. What is it? The factor that is lacking is, it seems to us, practical wisdom, that quality that combines the experience of the man of the world with the vision of the prophet. The rarity of this quality is evidenced by the dolorous social history of mankind. And yet this seems to us to be the only quality — or rather combination of qualities — that is going to tell.

We all of us — especially those of us who claim to be reformers and revolutionaries — have a tendency to fall in love with ideas very much as we fall in love with women; and to set a wholly fictitious value upon them. What we need is a less rigid system than this exclusive monogamic (as it were) devotion to some set idea; we need to treat ideas as the great and free lover treats the women he loves. Let us remember that in this age the old hard-and-fast social ideas are all being questioned, and most of them denied. It behoves us therefore to cease to hold exclusively to the old-fashioned doctrinaire sets of ideas that satisfied our cruder intellectual forebears.

What I am trying to 'get across' is the idea of the necessity for a more fluid, more agile, mode of thought and of life. One has only to go to Hyde Park and hear scores of reformers and revolutionaries of all shapes and brands howling against each other, to realise how narrow and feeble are those intellectual unfortunates who are wed exclusively to one idea, to the exclusion and rejection of all others. I am beginning to suspect the intellect of anyone who calls himself after the name of some partial reform, or of some thinker or worker of the past. For life's sake, let us remember that we are men and women, with human parts and passions; and let us boldly and deliberately admit free love into the world of ideas. What we want is not a crowd of followers, but a nucleus of men and women who live freely and happily and wisely in the realm of thought. This ideal is the antithesis of herd-morality and of herd-mentality. It is, indeed, the apotheosis of Idea and of Ideal. I can guess how great a heresy will be charged against me by the fanatical devotees of all so-called reforms. I am in sympathy with nearly all of them, and I here set on record the underlying reason for my sympathy with the ideal of Anarchism. Anarchism, like Atheism, is a negative term, but it has its positive side; and it is this positive side that I have tried in this plea for *Freedom* to put forward. If I have failed, no doubt some of the readers of this newly-born journal will put me right.

I suggest that it would be interesting for other readers of, and contributors to, *Freedom* to give their views upon this question of the importance of mental fluidity, and of the relationship between doctrinaire thought and the ideas — and the Ideal — of Liberty.

For Vickybird, anarchism, humanism and libertarianism were in essence one, and reading the above, it is easy to see why Owen's

writings had so inspired him, easy to see why the two men had had so much in common. Owen's words — 'I see the masses caught in a net woven so cunningly that they do not sense their danger; trapped by the mechanism of a system they cannot understand' (*Anarchism versus Socialism*) — are echoed in Vickybird's writing in both *Freedom* and in his own paper *Comment*. In the latter the echoes may be heard in the verses he wrote as 'Benjie', a poet who also wrote in *Freedom* from time to time. Consider an item in *Comment* (9 December 1936):

Tribute

Easy for kings to fashion lords,
Easy for lords to fashion kings;
Such matters mean a crowd of swords,
Buckets of blood, and well-tugged strings.

With sword and string are empires built,
When swords are wiped, then strings are pulled,
And God alone must bear the guilt —
That is his role — when men are gulled.

But looking back along the road
That man has travelled from the beast,
Intolerable has been his load,
Burdened, poor dupe, with king and priest.

Wherefore, incredulous, we smile,
Beholding just one king, above
The priests' and politicians' guile,
Who holds an empire less than love.

Back to the stark humanity,
The primal dream all things above,
Worth wars and woes and vanity,
Virtue and vice, the thing called love.

So we, for now the unheeded few,
Who take no stock in king or priest,
Salute, O king, the Man in you,
Who held love most, and empire least.

It is interesting to compare this with his editorial 'Poet's Corner' in the same issue of *Comment*, in which he wrote that 'authority has for centuries been engaged in poisoning the wells of truth'. And this is not so far from an article he wrote in *Freedom* three years before: 'Between the tyrannies of State Socialism, and Fascism, (otherwise Bureaucracy) mankind must be safely steered if the ideal of liberty is to be saved' (June 1933).

In May 1931, Vickybird's name appeared in *Freedom* under an article

entitled 'The Next Move' which discussed the need for a radical change in the approach to education of the masses:

In the few decades . . . since Europe became literate-in-general, the old popular ideas have all gone . . . [to be replaced by] A lumpish squat-shaped oppressive idea of Democracy; an ideal majority rule by an imaginary entity or God worshipped by most unreflecting Socialists.

Popular education, he went on, had replaced the 'stupid, garish regalia beloved of savages' with 'the divine right of Demos'.

Yet if history teaches anything, it teaches that majorities are wrong nearly every time. . . . Because the wisdom necessary to a clear appreciation of fact and event is inevitably limited to a few . . . today's need is to educate the majority into the knowledge that there is such a thing as a minority, sounder ethically and intellectually than itself because further seeing. In this direction lies the aristocracy of the future — a spiritual aristocracy. How this is to be established, it is the business of Libertarianism to discover.

It is the last sentence of this article that reveals Vickybird's true colours. He was above all a humanist and a libertarian, only really on the fringe of anarchism as a movement.

From August 1932 until April 1933, Vickybird wrote a series of articles about the French anarchist Jean Grave, arising from the publication of his memoirs *Le Mouvement Libertaire sous la Troisième République* (1930). He placed Grave in the same rank as Lingg, Most, Malatesta and Owen, and honoured his long devotion to the cause of liberty.

In May 1933 he wrote an article entitled 'May Day', a day he saw very much as a labour festival of unbroken tradition and unchanged purpose: 'It is up to the workers to deliver us from the dictators, the dictators' aim is to deliver us from freedom. The issue is clear.'

In April 1933, Vickybird was given the job of poetry editor of *The Sunday Referee*, edited by Mark Goulden. In this capacity he ran a weekly 'Poet's Corner', encouraging the public to submit poems for comment and, if the work was good enough, for publication. It was in this way that he discovered Dylan Thomas and a number of other young writers later to become famous.

At the same time Vickybird became more important in *Freedom*. From June 1933, his work appeared over the signature 'Freedominus'. The editorial in this issue also bore the mark of his style, although simply signed 'The Editor'. He wrote most of the editorials for the next eighteen months, signed 'Freedominus' for the rest of 1933 and then 'V.B.N.' during 1934. He actually edited *Freedom* for most of 1934.

It is a common experience among the editors of anarchist papers that they do not always command complete agreement from their colleagues. In this, Vickybird, perhaps not surprisingly, was no exception. In November 1934, his editorial, entitled 'Freedom',

defended, as was his wont, freedom of speech even for those such as Fascists and Communists who denied such freedom for others:

Ought there to be free speech? Is a free press needed? Is there such a commodity as abstract Freedom — that is, such a principle as freedom? . . .

Fascism quite openly denies freedom to all its opponents. What about the modern form of Communism?

In these times it seems almost fantastic to assert the principle of minority rights. Yet it is true, that all progress, inventions, discovery and improvement are due directly to minorities; working, toiling, fighting, suffering, in the teeth of overwhelming and almost insurmountable majority opposition.

What distinguishes a civilised human from a barbarian is the manner wherein he habitually treats those of his fellow-humans who differ from him in essentials.

Out of ages of persecution and intolerance there has arisen as a development of social evolution, the principle of Free Speech, and the medium of a Free Press, without which free discussion of ideas is impossible. This is not mere idealism or Utopianism, it is historic and psychological fact; applicable to every possible shade of opinion.

The old Freethinkers and Radicals, without exception, fought and worked for allowing their opponents, equally with themselves, freedom of voice and pen. . . .

This drew an anonymous note of dissent on the same page! It is interesting to see that almost exactly a year later, in his own paper *Comment*, Vickybird reiterated these points: 'The real test of civilisation — of culture if you will — is, How do you treat those who differ from you? In other words, the keynote of civilisation is Fair Play' (28 December 1935). This kind of writing was typical of his style, and exemplified his lifelong commitment to libertarian and humanist ideals.

At the end of 1934 he ceased to be editor of *Freedom*, but from January 1935 a column called 'What We Think' appeared above his initials. The first of these defended libertarianism rather than anarchism. In February he again wrote the editorial and a poem by 'Benjie' appeared next to it. This poem is as valid a comment on much of today's press as it was then:

Pacification

Joyously gentle is the Dope
Outladdled by our Free-Street Peers:
Prince Punk in audience with the Pope;
You can't beat Claymore's Bottled Beers.

Red Executioner goes bats
A Tory split lets Labour in,
Wise wenches plump for pork pie hats,
Life is worth while with Smithson's Gin.

Darwin's debunked. Professor Clump,
D.D., has proved how bright God is;
How many camels have no hump?
Try Jellijubes for Rheumatiz.

You can't beat Claymore's Bottled Beers,
Received in audience by the Pope;
Darwin's disproved by Pressgang Peers;
And hell! You can't beat Fleet Street dope.

In July, in 'What We Think' Vickybird described the *Daily Herald*, Britain's only allegedly left-wing paper, as 'a capitalist sheet, interested in keeping things as they are in the interests of Capitalism'.

In the August-September 1935 issue, 'What We Think' was the editorial, and Vickybird discussed education in terms which once again are as relevant to any discussion of today's education as they were to that of the 1930s. He described it as 'vicious' and added that 'in the names of love and compassion, the state teaches hate and savagery'. Once again he called on libertarianism to alter this state of affairs. 'Benjie' on the same page presented a further comment:

Poison Gas

Wondrous the spreading of culture
— They call it 'amazing' in Fleet —
Providing a final sepulture
For every sad son of the street.

When Capitalism runs in alliance
With Militarism and Tripe
They call the result of it 'science'
When civilisation goes ripe.

Men, cattle, birds, vegetation,
Transformed into ashes and mud
Prove the merit of civilisation,
When mingled with poison and blood.

Great are the glories of Science;
When harnessed by Mars they are final;
A gentle and noble alliance
To make Europe a shambles-urinal.
Plus ça change!

In October 1935, Vickybird discussed the vexed question 'What is Freedom?'. Again this took the place of an editorial. In November

1935, again in the editorial spot, he wrote another article worth quoting in full:

Free Speech

Without enthusiasm we hear of the deliberate prevention of Free Speech by anyone, anywhere. Almost, but not quite alone in the English-speaking world, we plead for the right of any speaker or writer to express his or her views within the very widest possible limits. Free speech goes hand-in-hand with a Free Press; these twin aspects of Freedom are inseparable.

No-one who cannot patiently hear or read views opposed to his own has any idea of what Freedom means. Freedom implies the right of anyone to speak or write as he will on any subject whatever, provided he refrains from gross obscenity and gross personality.

Those who, in the name of Fascism, would try to prevent the dissemination of Communist views; those who, in the name of Communism, would stifle Fascism by force, are equally foes to Freedom. Bricks and stones, sticks and knuckle-dusters, are merely attempts by moral savages, whatever labels their users may choose to adopt, to stifle free discussion.

If freedom of speech be a reality, and we hold that it is, Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Atheists, have an absolute right to express themselves in their own way, and without censure or censor. Their critics and opponents have an equal right courteously to oppose, if they see fit.

Those Communists who break-up Fascist meetings, those Fascists who mob Communists, on principle, are equally guilty of being foes to Freedom and to Civilisation. For ourselves, we deplore all freedom-stifling organisations as foes alike to freedom, happiness, progress and fair play.

A brick, however accurately cast, is no reply to any argument. Mobbing of any platform, only proves the black-guardism of the mobbers. Retaliations ensure — 'reprisals', in militarist phrase — and in the scuffle Truth, is put to flight.

Partisanship as easily degenerates into fanaticism as bigotry slips into violence of speech and action.

Freedom of expression is more important than any religious or political sect in the world; for without it not one of them would exist.

By this conception of freedom we will stand or fall; and so will civilisation.

This was his last contribution to *Freedom* which itself ceased publication within a year, at the time of the Spanish Civil War and Revolution.

In his first contribution to *Freedom* Vickybird wrote: 'What we need is Independence — independence of thought, of idea, of ideal, of outlook. . . . [This is] the Anarchist contribution to the common stock of thought.' It was in this vein that his contributions continued. The hallmark of his style while writing for *Freedom* was his firm conviction

that freedom belonged to all alike. Three years later, in June 1933, he defined 'our Libertarian movement':

It is the soul of man that runs the world; it is the soul of man that will save the world, if it is to be saved. It is scarcely necessary to mention that the word 'soul' is used here purely in a sociological sense.

It is interesting to note that he felt that this needed to be said — most other anarchist writers would have taken it as read. He continued:

It is against enslavement itself, and not any particular form of slavery that our Libertarian Movement is directed.

Few though they may be at the moment, the Libertarians are the only humans who are fighting for Liberty itself. . . . Our programme is at once simple and all embracing — the freedom of the soul of man.

Later in the same year he wrote:

Every human born on this planet has a right — the right of birth — to reasonable food, clothing, shelter and recreation, absolutely freely. This human right is at present limited to the 'Upper Classes' who jealously keep it for themselves. When it is the common right of all classes, society will be free, not before. (December 1933)

In November 1935, Vickybird's position at the *Sunday Referee* came to a sudden end with the paper's reorganisation. It is interesting to note that this was the only time in his life, apart from his army service, when he had paid employment. To replace 'Poet's Corner' he and Sheila (Runia) MacLeod produced their own paper *Comment*, which appeared weekly for just over a year from 7 December 1935 to 30 January 1937. He ceased writing for *Freedom* and contributed to no other anarchist paper; but in *Comment* he continued to write in the same libertarian vein and 'Benjie' continued to loose his poetic barbs against the gods of war and the state, with such titles as 'The Village Fascist' and 'Lady Blackshirt'. The last issue of *Comment* recommended the anarchist papers *Spain and The World* and *Fighting Call*.

Comment ceased publication because by 1937 Vickybird's health was seriously deteriorating. He died of tuberculosis in May 1940. Fittingly, the last person outside the family to see him alive was Herbert Cutner of the *Freethinker*.

The writer Rupert Croft-Cooke, who knew Vickybird slightly in his days as the proprietor of the Vine Press, described a later meeting with him in one of his autobiographical volumes, *Glittering Pastures* (1962). One evening in the early 1930s he saw Vickybird coming from the back room of a Chinese restaurant in Soho with a group of 'particularly ferocious looking young men'.

I said — 'I didn't know you were a communist, Vickybird.' He became very serious. 'Not communist,' he said, and then with gleeful triumph, 'Anarchist!' . . . He was full of his movement, group, cell, whatever it was. He was writing and meeting young people. He had plans. His eyes in that long unchanged face were alight with enthusiasm

Jean Overton Fuller, who knew Vickybird well during his time with *The Sunday Referee* and throughout most of his editorship of *Comment*, wrote a rather eccentric biography of him, *The Magical Dilemma of Victor Neuburg* (1965). She recorded a conversation she witnessed in 1936 between Vickybird and A. L. Morton, later the doyen of Marxist historians. Vickybird declared himself to be 'a red, red, red, red, red, revolutionary', but not a Communist. 'I'm not against the Government, I'm against any possible form of government that ever has been or could be.'

'I used to edit a little paper called *Freedom*', said Vickybird. 'But I was too anarchic even for the Anarchists. I'm an anarchist with a small *a*, not a capital.' He hadn't wanted to edit the official Anarchist organ, but they came to him saying they couldn't find anybody else and he hadn't the heart to refuse. . . . When they suggested he resign he was a little hurt because he had given a lot of time to it, yet it was a relief.

Victor B. Neuburg was by no means an 'orthodox' anarchist, if there is such a thing. He was, however, a part of the anarchist movement in the early 1930s and his work in *Freedom* and *Comment* shows how, for a little while, he was a poet among the anarchists.

Note

Victor B. Neuburg's surviving papers are for the most part in the possession of the author, who is working on a full-length biography (with a detailed bibliography). The Thomas H. Keell papers are in the Nettlau Collection, International Institute of Social History, Amsterdam.

Biographical material may be found in Jean Overton Fuller's book *The Magical Dilemma of Victor Neuburg* (1965) and V. E. Neuburg's pamphlet *Vickybird, A Memoir by his Son* (Polytechnic of North London, 1983).

Biographical references may also be found in Nina Hamnett *Laughing Torso* (1932), Arthur Calder Marshall *The Magic of My Youth* (1951), Rupert Croft-Cooke *Glittering Pastures* (1962), and books on Aleister Crowley and Dylan Thomas.

Brian Richardson

The Appalling State of Modern Architecture

We all know what is meant by 'the appalling state of modern architecture', but why is there so little discussion of what is actually wrong with it?

I am reminded of some thoughts on the subject which I once shared with the South Place Ethical Society. I was actually afraid that I had got off on the wrong foot. I was lying in bed shivering with 'flu, just before Christmas one year. The telephone rang, and on a crackly line I heard Peter Cadogan's unmistakable voice asking me to do a talk on the appalling state of Christmas crackers.

Never surprised by Peter, I quickly prepared a short thesis on the subject. Crackers have indeed become appalling, really the peak of shoddiness. Most of them don't work properly. You have to put enormous effort into operating them because the paper has the wrong tensile strength. When they do part, a satisfactory explosion is a rarity. Inside are a predictable paper hat of sickening colour and unvarying design, a mean thing that does the least possible to qualify as a hat; an equally futile and repulsive toy, usually of plastic sent from Hong Kong, but quite without any Oriental mystery or delight; and a motto. Well, it is still called a motto, but it is usually a feeble joke without relevance to the profound meaning and significance of the pagan festival we call Christmas.

What has gone wrong? Were things always so? Can one have a vision of better crackers worthy of modern man (I include woman and child in this term)? The problem of producing good Christmas crackers is not a technical one, or it would be easily solved by any technocrat skilled in producing such marvels as anti-personnel mines or synthetic chemical fertilisers. No, it is a matter of social morality. A good cracker is a statement of belief in the value and dignity of each person at the Christmas party. We don't care enough about people to have good crackers. We don't consider individual tastes and needs, but think that mass-produced crackers will do. They are a product of alienated workers who have no interest in or connection with the equally alienated consumers who will use them. It is inevitable that the result is boring and pathetic.

It doesn't need to be so. In the good old days of the original Nuclear

Disarmament movement, our group decided to make crackers to raise funds at the Christmas bazaar. None of us were professionals at the job. We knew what we wanted to do, and we acquired the necessary skills to do it. We chose beautifully coloured crepe paper, we got fierce percussive strips, we put individually chosen trifles of artistic merit in each — things hand-made or collected on our travels abroad. For mottos, we cut quotations from Bakunin, Malatesta and Kropotkin from the tops of old copies of *Freedom*. We enjoyed making the crackers, we sold them cheaply, we made money, and then we had fun using them when we bought them from one another.

Unfortunately, Peter's letter confirming the arrangements for my talk came as my temperature returned to normal. To my initial consternation, I read the subject-title: 'The Appalling State of *English Architecture*'! But I soon forgot my crossness at having worked in vain, when I saw how simply the terms could be changed to express exactly what was wrong in this other but parallel case. We must all agree that, like tawdry Christmas commercial tinsel, the modern built environment is repellent. The towns are massive, sprawling, noisy and foul; the country is littered with eyesores and buildings inappropriate to their setting: everywhere there is ugliness and disorder.

But what, precisely, are we complaining for? First of all, there is the abandonment of human scale. A great help to understanding the mechanics of scale in architecture is the chapter in Kirkpatrick Sale's book *Human Scale* (1980) called 'We Shape Our Buildings' (and thereafter our buildings shape us). Summarising his findings very briefly, we learn that there are critical distances at which the eye can recognise human expressions, and certain angles of vision at which three-dimensional volumes can be seen in their entirety. Thus the ideal height of buildings at, say, a street width of 72 feet is three or four storeys — or, at 48 feet, two or three storeys. We may recognise somebody greeting us across the street, and we may observe the tops of trees over the roofs — so we feel comfortable. He says that the most durable urban neighbourhoods all over the world, from Greenwich Village to Montmartre to Chelsea, are to this scale.

In almost all successful medieval cities, the crucibles in which our very concepts of urbanity were formed, both business and residential buildings tended to be three or four storeys tall . . . observable still today in a number of European cities [such as] Oxford where both college and city buildings from the 14th century onward tend to be two or three storeys, interspersed with a few frilly six and eight storey Gothic towers; Amsterdam where certain older parts of the city . . . show an intimate neighbourhood scale with all buildings at two or three storeys; most of those traditional English villages like the Cotswolds . . . and the wonderfully preserved Dutch city of Naarden, still today very much as it was in the late medieval period, which has almost no structures over three

storeys except the central cathedral, and where you can walk down the streets and easily view the handsome, solid buildings and still see the leafy green tops of the trees beyond.

When these considerations are ignored today, we get buildings which are far too high for their street widths.

Our cities are stacked up in layers which bear testimony to the skills of the surveyor and engineer . . . but they exhibit no connection with body-centred value-charged sense of space we started with from childhood. . . . Take for example a typical curtain wall skyscraper. . . . We can neither measure ourselves against it nor imagine a bodily participation. Our bodily response is reduced to little more than a craned head, wide eyes, or perhaps an open jaw in appreciation of some magnificent height. . . . There are no human-scale elements in such buildings, no sense whatsoever of how many of us it would take to make up one of them, no statement to us as to how we are to see, enter, or use it, nothing to convey a sense of intimacy, or invitation, or sociability, or humanity.

We may also take the example of the modern British housing estate, laid out to suit the borough surveyor's interpretation of the needs not of the walking human being, not even the motor car, but rather of the visiting motor lorry, with enormous road-widths, high kerbs, huge radius bends, clear sight-lines across corners, and dominant street-lamp standards and traffic signs — all dwarfing the potential human scale of the little bungalows and cosy gardens.

Another failing, which is particularly prone to spoil domestic buildings, even when the scale is right, is the meanness of the materials used. The modern attitude to housing cost is that everything must be the cheapest obtainable. But mass-production techniques produce low costs only if material is turned out endlessly without variation. We have mass-produced building materials, and of course the result is dull uniformity. All our buildings get to look the same. Infinitely varied clay roof tiles have given way to identical tinted concrete imitations; slates no longer come from Welsh quarries but are made from asbestos substitute, dyed blue; thatch, which is ecologically, aesthetically and practically marvellous, has disappeared from new construction (thank goodness there are a few thatchers about to maintain the wonderful examples we still have); mellow brickwork is a thing of the past, since hardly anyone can afford any but the cheapest steam-kilned fletton bricks, made by a highly mechanised process producing a ubiquitous soapy pink brick which may be varied only by a dusting of coloured sand to the outside; plastic gutters and pipes are cheaper than robust cast iron and have become universal; beautiful and long-lasting woodblock flooring has been displaced by thin vinyl tiles or wall-to-wall rayon carpet; and so on — unfortunately the dismal list could be continued endlessly.

Another result of the obsession with cheapness in modern buildings is the proliferation of nasty building forms like narrow-fronted terraced houses and rectangular multi-storey slab blocks containing cellular spaces (rather than rooms) which can be naturally lit from only one side, so that the rooms are very bright just at the window end and dark everywhere else. As a result, the glare created by the light-dark contest is disturbing. Light from two sides is much preferable and is necessary to let us see intricate things and to read in detail the minute expressions that flash across people's faces. Such buildings also tend to have long sterile corridors which feel dead and monotonous, and stuffy internal bathrooms which have only artificial lighting and ventilation and are not places of joy in which to linger.

System-built blocks of flats have been disastrous. Many of the forebodings I expressed on this subject nearly 20 years ago (in *Anarchy* 97) have proved all too well founded. System-building has proved a threat to architecture; it has failed to do what its advocates claimed for it; and, even if it had succeeded in its own terms, it is now clear that its inherent monotony desecrates whatever landscape it is put into. So bad are some examples that they have had to be demolished even before they were paid for — and all have given anxiety about their physical safety. Inferior cement, reinforcing wires weakened by corrosion and the effects of fires, gas explosions overstraining structural connections, cladding brickwork and panels falling off — all these have occasionally cropped up. But almost universally the system-built blocks have suffered from dampness, both from rain penetration and from condensation. They are not generally loved as places to live in.

Like the dowdy Christmas cracker, these dreary buildings gave little pleasure in craftsmanship to their constructors and deny the human value of their reluctant users. Mystery and delight did not find their way into the hard-nosed budgets. No, we have no reason to feel pride in our architecture.

Has this always been so? Did people feel the same in the past? It hardly seems so. We certainly admire past achievement; is this just familiarity with time-hallowed scenes, or is it a question of the architecture of the past expressing a common purpose, a sense of social identity, a sense of scale? Was our former architecture a reflection of a more wholesome relationship between life, work and environment than now? Was there a comprehensive social and economic order, an accepted ethic that naturally expressed itself in buildings which, serving those known functions and created in traditional ways, took on an orderly and comely expression?

One does not have to be falsely sentimental about the good old days to believe that this is so. The visual evidence is very strong. The towns

were more tightly knit, with a strong identity. As Kirkpatrick Sale observed, there was a generally small scale, so that face-to-face contacts in the urban community were normal, but there was a truly impressive scale reserved for the places set aside for large assemblies of significant purpose. The city, as well as having visual unity, had a large degree of autonomy in the control of its affairs, giving the citizens a strong feeling of involvement and civic pride. The town had a mutually dependent relationship with its surrounding countryside, which provided its food and traded in its market for those relatively few specialised artifacts that were beyond the resources of the village craftsmen to provide. In the country there were even more rigid social divisions than would be tolerable today, but there was a shared sense of involvement in agricultural husbandry — a feeling of continuity and dependence on the seasons and the soil. Although social systems were inequitable and often harsh, the cooperation of everybody in productive tasks was important and in a way rewarding. In town and country alike, everybody was familiar with the way buildings were put together.

Of course I realise that there were shortcomings in the old ways, and we would find it uncomfortable to go back to the meanest and flimsiest unserviced cottages that were many people's lot. But modern standards of hygiene and warmth are not unmitigated blessings. The earth closet has much to commend it, and modern water-borne sewage disposal has many hazards, some now becoming acute. The high temperatures we have become accustomed to with central heating and cheap gas are not really desirable, and cannot be sustained for ever. It is quite fashionable today to denigrate the allegedly sentimental view of the cosy rural cottage, and to assert that most people lived in mean, leaky, damp hovels which we have forgotten about because they have all fallen down long since. I doubt this. Of course there was bad building then, as always, and some people could not afford to shelter themselves adequately. But stone and clay, wood and thatch were locally available almost everywhere, and where I now live in Herefordshire, for instance, the number of essentially primitive but sturdy and well-thought-out dwellings that have survived for centuries is astounding. I believe they were typical.

Dorothy Hartley describes in her book *Water in England* (1964, 1978) the management of water in medieval times, and illustrates how carefully the builders attend to land drainage to ensure that their houses were dry (without the benefit of the Building Inspector's obligatory damp proof course). She points out how modern occupants ignorant of old techniques have spoilt the cottages by earthing up flower-beds against the walls and putting concrete paths over the porous perimeter drains so carefully positioned to catch the drips from the wide

overhanging eaves of the thick thatch. They then complain of damp. But there was a time when the language of building was generally understood.

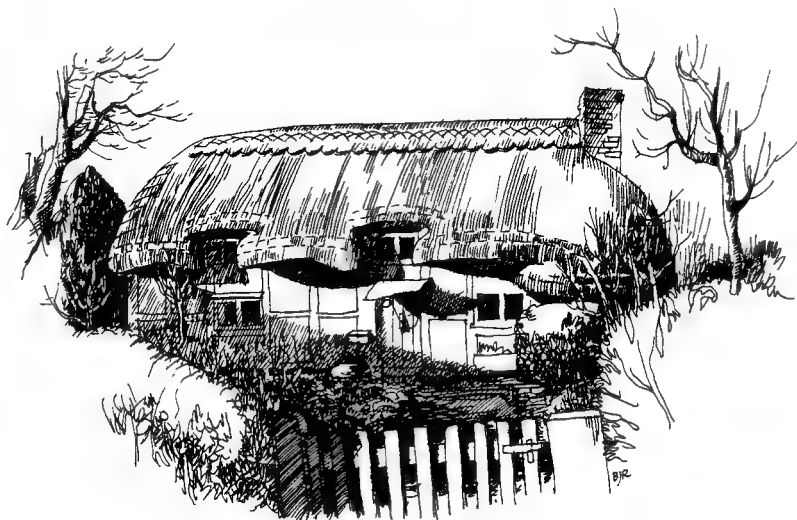
In short, there was a degree of harmony in the way people lived and with their environment, both built and natural. It shows today, in what we call our architectural heritage.

Our age, on the other hand, is characterised by rapid change, rampant expansion of the town at the expense of the country (itself depopulated through mechanised and chemical agriculture), a bewildering range of ethical standards, discontent among the underprivileged and consequent fear among the privileged. We cannot cope with the speed of change. The social structure is upset without being radically improved. Our grasp of technology is undermined — before one innovation is absorbed, another supersedes it. Aesthetic judgement is deranged. In this situation, the crudest drives have full reign, greed and repression become dominant. Short-term responses to ward off imminent dangers lead to hasty and erroneous policy decisions whose damaging effect is cumulative. Bad goes to worse.

Now there is obvious dissonance between man and his environment. Not only can we not feel pride in much of our building, we are becoming aware that the whole environment, built and natural, is threatened by our life-style. People are no longer involved directly in the activities which affect their destiny. The technology is complicated and mysterious, each process understood only by its own specialists. Alienation and loss of connection and control typify the age. Our architecture expresses this. Its forms are arbitrary and disorderly. We don't understand it, and we don't like it. The language of building is no longer common currency. We leave it to the specialists.

It follows that the remedy must lie in a revolution which takes the form of re-establishing patterns of connection and involvement for people at large to exercise control over their lives and environment. After the revolution, harmony will be restored and architecture will bloom again, no less. But such a revolution is not to be waited for and will not be accomplished by any one great political act. It is under way now, it is taking myriad forms, and we must join in with it at every point we recognise it.

The part of the revolution to do with architecture is in re-learning the language of building. We have been schooled to accept that only architects can understand and practise architecture. What is meant is 'certified' architects. In this country it is against the law for any people to style themselves as 'architects' unless they have satisfied the examiners (themselves 'professional' architects) of their acceptability, and registered with the Architects Registration Council of the United



Kingdom. It is a closed shop, claimed to exist to protect the public, but the public has been betrayed by the profession.

A first step in breaking the mould is for people who are critical of 'provided' housing to take matters into their own hands. Already the revolution is under way, as more and more self-builders construct with their own hands — 11,000 did so in 1986. They are learning by doing. I think it is possible to have a utopian dream of 'Architecture for All'.

It is not too extravagant an aim. Happily, it is still accepted that the finishing, equipping and interior decoration of the home are the prerogative of the occupant. Do-it-yourself thrives. I only ask that the facilities for people to educate themselves in these tasks are further improved, and that the principle is extended to cover ever wider fields. The necessary understanding could be disseminated right through the populace and the activity of building our own environment could again be undertaken by the people. Not entirely without architects — nobody with such a disastrous record can be all bad! The professionals will learn their lesson, and will take their proper place, not as a privileged elite with a closely guarded mystery of their own, but as friends and advisers of a building community.

Of course, other segments of the revolution will have to roll on a little to make this utopia accessible. The main precondition to bringing housing activity back into people's hands is the redistribution of land. I leave other writers to sketch out the range of entirely feasible adjustments to the present grossly inequitable system that would do

this. For my own part, I shall try in a future article to describe an approach to building by lay people which was the contribution made by a remarkable (and quite untypical) architect — the late Walter Segal, a decade ago in the London Borough of Lewisham. I was working there as a Council architect at the time, and I was able to introduce Walter to a group of citizens on the Council's housing waiting list who proceeded with his help to build their own excellent houses.

Yes, it can be done, it has already been done, it must be done again and again, and more people should know about it. I look forward not only to describing this truly revolutionary episode, but also to drawing some conclusions from it.

So what else happened in the Nineteen Sixties?

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Colin Ward

Welcoming the Thinner City

In August 1987 an advertisement appeared in the press that asked: 'Could you think of a way to regenerate Britain's inner cities for £15,000?' Now I'm a poor writer, so my guiding principle is to apply for everything in sight, as the books I sweat over bring me much praise but little money. The result is that I won the Charles Douglas-Home Memorial Trust Award, so I have every reason to be grateful to the Trustees for their trust in me.

Now I bring to the problems of the inner city a few simple ideas. They aren't original ideas. In fact they've been around for such a long time that they should have been heeded by more influential people than me. My ideas about the future of cities derive from three Victorian sages — the geographer and anarchist Peter Kropotkin, the designer and socialist William Morris, and the shorthand-writer and inventor Ebenezer Howard.

Kropotkin, in his book *Fields, Factories and Workshops*, published in 1899, argued for decentralisation, both on a national and a world scale. He wrote:

The scattering of industries over the country — so as to bring the factory amidst the fields, to make agriculture derive all those profits which it always finds in being combined with industry and to produce a combination of industrial with agricultural work — is surely the next step to be taken. . . . This step is imposed by the necessity for each healthy man and woman to spend a part of their lives in manual work in the free air; and it will be rendered the more necessary when the great social movements, which have now become unavoidable, come to disturb the present international trade, and compel each nation to revert to her own resources for her own maintenance.

Morris, in his utopia *News From Nowhere*, published in 1890, looked back from the twenty-first century on the twentieth, and remarked in a marvellous passage that I had never noticed until I read it at the head of an excellent article by David Pepper, 'The Geography and Landscapes of an Anarchist Britain' (in *The Raven* 4):

This is how we stand. England was once a country of clearings amongst the woods and wastes, with a few towns interspersed, which were fortresses for the feudal army, markets for the folk, gathering places for the craftsmen. It then became a country of huge and foul workshops and fouler gambling dens, surrounded by an ill-kept, poverty-stricken farm, pillaged by the masters of the

workshops. It is now a garden, where nothing is wasted and nothing is spoilt, with the necessary dwellings, sheds and workshops scattered up and down the country, all trim and neat and pretty. For indeed, we should be too much ashamed of ourselves if we allowed the making of goods, even on a large scale, to carry with it the appearance, even of desolation and misery.

Then there was Howard, who in 1898 brought out his book *Tomorrow: A Peaceful Path to Real Reform*, known to us by the new title he gave it in 1902, *Garden Cities of Tomorrow*. In 1904 Howard declared:

I venture to suggest that while the age in which we live is the age of the great closely-compacted, overcrowded city, there are already signs, for those who can read them, of a coming change so great and so momentous that the twentieth century will be known as the period of the great exodus, the return to the land.

Between them, these three nineteenth-century dreamers saw better than their contemporaries, and better than some of ours, what was happening to the Victorian industrial city. It was assumed by *them* that Britain would stay the workshop of the world and that for ever more the world would depend on textiles from Lancashire, coal from Newcastle, and ships from the Clyde. Kropotkin reminded them that the world was changing, and that new technologies would change it much more. Morris reminded them, and us, that the golden age of the cities is a myth. When Britain was exporting the products of heavy industry all over the world, when the docks were full of shipping and the mills and factories thriving, the newly urbanised city working class was living in poverty and squalor, even when employed. Howard discerned that the movement out of the cities was to be a characteristic of Britain, Europe and North America all through the twentieth century.

Sixteen years ago I was one of a group of people who were trying to influence the way geography was taught in the early years of the secondary school through a series of books called 'Human Space', published by Penguin Education. The idea was to introduce children to geographical *concepts* rather than fill them with topographical information. No sooner were the first three books rolling off the presses than ownership of Penguin changed hands and their education division was closed down. I had to buy up very cheaply the remaining copies of my book to save it from the ignominy of being pulped, and for years I gave parcels of it to schools and sold copies to adults.

My book was simply called *Utopia*, since it inquired into people's ideal places, but it was really about settlement patterns. In the course of this book I told my readers two completely true stories about real people. There was the Quispe family, Quechua-speaking Indians from the *altiplano* of Peru, who in the 1950s took the first step of moving from their village, simply out of hunger, first to a sugar plantation on the coast, then to the overcrowded slums of inner-city Lima, and finally

to a new settlement or *barrida* way beyond the city limits, where walls of straw were eventually replaced by concrete blocks strong enough to support an upper storey. Gradually the Quispe family and their neighbours built a sewer and a school and wired the house for electricity which they bought from another squatter with a diesel generator. In fifteen years they had moved in and out of the city but had established a place in the urban fabric.

Fifty years earlier Thomas Byrne, at eighteen, left his father's poverty-stricken farm in Kerry in the West of Ireland, and sought work in the city of Cork. Then he moved to Canning Town in London, and his uncle got him a job in the Royal Albert Dock. He married and rented a room in Freemason's Road, where his son Jim was born. One day the Byrne family took a free excursion train to Laindon in Essex, where an estate agent was auctioning plots of derelict farm land. When they got home that night they had bought for a £1 deposit a £6 plot of land 6½ yards wide and 33 yards deep, in New Century Road (which was simply a row of pegs in a field). They had their first ever holidays there in an army surplus bell tent, and planted roses and apple trees from Woolworths. They built a cabin there and, bombed out from West Ham in the Second World War, moved in for good. Mr Byrne slowly rebuilt the cabin as a house and his own children grew up there. Now he and his wife have moved further into rural Essex. 'My family', he told me, 'have been country folk, city dwellers, suburbanites and country folk again, all in two generations, and there must be thousands like us.'

Both these families were part of the enormous movements of population in which British cities grew like mushrooms in an incredible expansion of population during the nineteenth century, and in which the cities of Latin America have grown during the second half of the twentieth century. These families of displaced peasants were obliged to throng to the cities and subsequently moved out to the periphery in search of a better life, more space and opportunities.

Inner-city life was a temporary phenomenon in their family life history, just as it has been in my family life history or yours. Certain poor districts in the cities — a key example is Spitalfields in East London — were described by the Chicago school of urban geographers as the Zone of Transition, the place where incomers gain a foothold in the urban economy and win that urban know-how, before moving on like the Quispe or Byrne families. Spitalfields, densely populated in the early decades of this century, but with a population dwindled today to about 9,000, is a very good example. The Huguenot silk weavers were followed by the Irish and then by the Jews, who in turn moved out of the Zone of Transition, their place taken by the Bengalis from poor

rural Sylhet in Bangladesh, clinging like all their predecessors to the foothold provided by the clothing industry and its ancillaries: labour-intensive, requiring little capital, small in scale, and flexible both in terms of the workplace and the market.

Hemmed in as they are by the expansion of the City financial district and its property speculation on one side and White racism on the other, the test will be whether the Bengalis, too, are able to move on and out like all their predecessors.

In the last century, when social Darwinism (a misinterpretation of Darwin's theory of natural selection) was an acceptable philosophy, observers used to blame the problems of the mushrooming cities on the riff-raff of the population that was immigrating from depressed rural areas. They suggested that the country was exporting its thriftless, footloose elements to the town. At the very same time, observers of what was seen as the crisis of rural life were lamenting that the able, enterprising, stable, bright and adventurous members of the village population were those who had emigrated, leaving behind those who lacked these qualities. At each end of the railway line the poor were blamed for being poor and were described as a self-perpetuating underclass.

A century later it was the cities that were losing population rapidly. In the 1970s the word was spread around in academic chat-shows that this was a disaster, and that the government-sponsored New Towns (the ultimate heirs of Howard's Garden City propaganda) were to blame for stealing people and jobs from the cities. In vain the advocates of the New Towns pointed out that this planned dispersal had absorbed only one-eighth of the enormous outward movement from London, or that of the jobs generated in Milton Keynes, for example, one-sixteenth were exported from London. The nineteenth-century stereotypes were then brought into play again, but in reverse. The new-found friends of the urban poor claimed that the New Towns had taken on only the skilled and enterprising. On the other hand, teachers and social workers in the New Towns themselves would take me aside and confidentially explain, in the shining new schools, that 'we have a terrible lot of problem families with very little motivation and ambition'.

All these subjective impressions are relative, of course, and many are based on nothing more than our well-known English snobbery. Ex-urbanite commuters living in towns and villages beyond the green belts wouldn't be seen dead in anything so plebeian as a New Town, precisely because the planned new and expanding towns — and this was very important — provided housing for rent for people who at the time could not conceivably hope to buy like the better-off outward movers.

It was Stephen Holley, for years the general manager of Washington New Town in County Durham, who summed up the intellectual double-think of our approach to the loss of population in the cities in the mordant lines:

Isn't it a pity
About the inner city?
People leave who shouldn't ought,
And that affects the rate support.
If only those who stayed behind
Had left instead, no one would mind.

I can remember years ago, in 1972, being at a conference in Newcastle upon Tyne, organised by the group called Newcastle Environmental Concern, where the planner Roy Gazzard remarked that on current trends the cities were becoming the habitats of the have-nots and the countryside becoming the habitat of the haves. He prophesied a new Fascist elite based on the countryside with its Land Rovers and gadgetry, completely independent of the rest of the population. Well, of course it *was* a picturesque exaggeration. When, ten years later, Peter Hall came to write the final report of the Social Science Research Council's Inner Cities Working Party, *The Inner Cities in Context*, he had to remind us that mistaken prescriptions could result from our stereotypes of the inner-city population, since, as he put it, 'a majority of inner-city people are not poor' and since 'most of the poor live outside the inner cities.'

All the same, allowing for the fact that there is a sense in which we can say that only the rich can *afford* to live in the inner city, others living there on sufferance or through subsidy, there is another sense in which we can perfectly well understand what Maurice Ash, as chairman of the Town & Country Planning Association, meant when he roundly declared that the combination of attempts to shore up the inner cities amounted in practice to nothing less than to *contain* the disadvantaged — 'a conspiracy', he said, 'because it suits the policies of our centralised state to keep the cities as prisons for the poor. It suits both those who want to manipulate the poor for reasons of power, and those who want to keep them from the preserves of the rich.'

Now I'm not talking about the relative merits of urban, suburban or rural life. They have been argued about since at least the time of the Romans. It's a matter of individual or family choice or preference. I say *family* because those who are free to make a choice usually do so in what they see as the interests of their children. And the choices change at different times in the family life-cycle. Metropolitan cities are a magnet for the young and unattached. Some people find them to be fine for the child-rearing part of life; others don't. Some people think they are great for retirement; many don't. Above a certain income level there is

freedom of choice; below a certain income level there is no choice at all. And it works both ways. Plenty of people who would like to move to the city can't afford to. Others who would like to move out can't afford to either.

Ebenezer Howard, in his great book, stressed that the whole purpose of his proposed ring of garden cities was to take the pressure of population off the central city, so that it would be possible to redevelop inner areas at those humane densities and garden greenery that people sought elsewhere. He was convinced that once the inner city had been 'demagnetised', as he put it, once large numbers of people had been convinced that 'they can better their conditions in every way by migrating elsewhere', the bubble of the monopoly value of inner-city land would burst. It didn't happen that way, of course, as every attempt to bring the betterment value of land into the hands of the community that generated it has failed. Not only that, but the issue has simply dropped off the agenda of any major political faction.

Howard's prophesied great exodus may not have been a return to the land, but the opportunities for poor people to join in this exodus in search of a more ample life or simply because traditional jobs have been evaporating, have steadily diminished. The establishment of Green Belts with all-party support has produced as a by-product what Peter Hall long ago called 'a civilised form of apartheid'. The rich can buy their way into the Green Belt, the commuting middle classes can leapfrog it into new settlements and old country towns and villages beyond. This is made clear in Martin Elson's magisterial study, *Green Belts: Conflict Mediation in the Urban Fringe* (1986). Lewis Keeble, discussing it in *The Planner*, remarks that this is 'the unacceptable face of green belts. How lovely to own a house in an area — town edge, village or green belt — where competition has been removed. Most of the good people who appear at public inquiries to object to development do not, I think, realise that they are supporting gross and unprincipled greed.'

In the 1970s the government commissioned a series of Inner Area Studies, and the one called *Inner London, Policies for Dispersal and Balance* by Shankland, Willmott and Jordan (1977) made it perfectly clear that, contrary to the conventional wisdom, excessive population pressure in London 'had been *insufficiently* relieved by decentralisation, either planned or unplanned'. And yet another publication from the mountain of research in the inner cities, *The London Employment Problem* by Nick Buck, Ian Gordon and Ken Young, part of the ESRC Inner Cities Research Programme Series (1986), stresses that 'the very selectivity of decentralisation, in which genuine opportunities for movement were available only to those who had access to

owner-occupation or who possessed the skills then required in the New and Expanding Towns, had done much to produce this situation'. The Inner Area Study confirmed that there *are* poor people in the inner cities who *do* desperately want to get out. All the other evidence identifies the policies or absence of policies that ensure that they can't. The avenues of escape have been closed, one by one.

Do you remember the time, a couple of years ago, when the British had a moral panic about a bunch of people known as the Peace Convoy or the Hippie Convoy, harried from site to site in the West of England in their old coaches and motor caravans? When they actually had a chance to say what *they* felt on their situation on Channel 4 television, several members interviewed contrasted the convoy way of life explicitly with living in the cities and described it as a consciously chosen alternative. They feared that the current harassment and impounding of vehicles is likely to leave them with no choice but to go back to the cities. They talked about a difference in quality of life between being unemployed in the city and unemployed in the community of the convoy. They talked about their right to choose the convoy life and not to be forced to live in the city. In choosing *mobile* accommodation, the convoyers are effectively exploiting the *only* remaining loophole (thanks to the traditional rights of bona fide Gypsies and holiday caravanners) available to people without cash, mortgage credit-worthiness or access to New Town rented accommodation, who nevertheless are determined to escape the city — a loophole which, as we can see, is currently being mercilessly tightened.

There was a time when desperate solutions like that of becoming mobile ruralists in clapped-out old buses, just to get out of the city, would seem absurd. But people do make rational choices, from their own standpoint, of the opportunities available to them.

In the first forty years of this century, poor people from Inner London, could, like the Byrne family I mentioned earlier, for a few pounds buy a plot of land in South Essex or Kent or by the seaside, to put up their shed, shack, shanty or chalet, which would start as a holiday retreat and would grow and be improved over time to become, very often, the retirement home of the original builders, or the permanent home of their children. These were the Plotlands, in the jargon of town-planners, and Dennis Hardy and I wrote a book about the ones in South East England — *Arcadia for All: the Legacy of a Makeshift Landscape* (1986). Similar settlements also exist in the hinterland of every metropolitan region.

They were one of the reasons for all-party support for the strict control of development introduced into post-war planning legislation, and if you read the pre-war literature of planning and conservation you

will be made aware of the intense horror that was felt by all right-thinking (that is to say, privileged) people at the desecration of the landscape they thought they saw. Dean Inge, a famous publicist of the period, coined the phrase 'bungaloid growth', with its implication that some kind of cancer was creeping over the face of the home counties. Howard Marshall, in an influential pre-war compendium edited by Clough Williams Ellis, *Britain and the Beast* (1937), declared that 'a gimcrack civilisation crawls like a giant slug over the country, leaving a foul trail of slime behind it'. In retrospect, we can easily see that the greater part of this disgust was ordinary misanthropy. The wrong sort of people were getting a place in the sun.

Now that the agricultural industry, in the heavily subsidised post-war triumph of over-production, has done its best to destroy those aspects of rural landscapes that all those country-lovers so cherished, by ripping up incredible miles of hedges, woods, copses and spinneys, draining wetlands and poisoning wildlife and watercourses with overdoses of fertilisers and pesticides, the myth of those precious agricultural acres has been exploded. Farmers are being urged to 'set aside' land.

It is perfectly clear to me that the campaign we should be involved in is one to engineer a shift in public opinion for areas to be set aside for a different purpose, areas where land values are artificially deflated, just as they have everywhere been artificially inflated, and where credit and security of tenure are available *and* the planning legislation and building regulations waived, so that those poor city-dwellers who want to move, *and* poor country-dwellers who have been priced out of the market, can house themselves, and improve their housing over time, just as happened in the Plotlands when the planners didn't forbid it, and just as happened to Blais Quispe in Peru.

And the interesting thing is that the conclusion we reach about the country is precisely the conclusion that you and I, and Morris, Kropotkin and Howard, have reached about the town. The Greening of the Cities is already happening. And it is happening not so much as a result of government action as through a huge, patchy jigsaw of little local initiatives, all those city farms, community gardens, green corridors, ecological parks and so on, winning a derelict site here, a bit of urban programme cash there, a haphazard spattering of Manpower Services Commission and job creation schemes all over the place. Confident of the value of reading to inform us about what is going on and how it can make our action more effective, I want to recommend no fewer than three new books. Joan Davidson's *How Green is Your City?* (Bedford Square Press, £4.95) is a practical guide to people's organisational experience all over the country, including accounts of

what went wrong; it is about job creation and recycling as well as about vegetation. Bob Smyth's *City Wildscape* (Hilary Shipman, £6.95) is about wildlife initiatives in British cities with a guide to over 300 sites; it is particularly good on the politics of environmental organisations. The third and most ambitious is David Nicholson-Lord's *The Greening of the Cities* (Routledge, £6.95) He takes a long-term view of what is happening on the ground in cities with many illuminating case-studies, and makes this interesting comment:

In jumbled and inchoate form, the fragments of a new land-use settlement for the post-industrial age lie around us: renewed housing pressures; mass unemployment coupled with a slow revolution in working patterns; an upheaval in farming; the unprecedented freeing of space in cities; the achievement of national population stability; and the radical revaluation of attitudes to countryside, wildlife and food production that are the most obvious fruits of environmentalism. History only needs a small nudge for these elements to fall neatly into place and for the outlines of a post-industrial land-use settlement to become clear.

In his view, 'this vast resettlement and re-education programme must be planned, managed and organised so that it is *not* planned, managed and organised. The state must contrive to make its operations invisible.' What he means by this is that successful local action depends on local and popular initiative, but that these in turn depend on exploiting such sources of finance, land and resources that have been won or can be won from the public purse. Direct public intervention is more expensive, and less effective from the point of view of citizens, especially poor citizens. This is certainly true of the London Docklands Development Corporation. It is probably true of a different kind of intervention: the Glasgow Eastern Area Renewal Project. The greening of Glasgow's East End has certainly been accomplished, but David Donnison warns in the book *Regenerating the Inner City* (1987) that the cost of maintaining the new landscape will be so high that 'much of it may eventually be allowed to run wild' (just what the Green folk would like of course), but he also makes the vital point that local groups should be given control of the budget and that there should be more opportunities for 'self-maintenance' by the provision of allotments and space for maintaining motor vehicles and ordinary homely land uses like that.

William Morris's ideal which I have quoted to you — of England as one big garden — is slowly, unwillingly and patchily, being realised, so long as you recognise that the garden, as we know it on a domestic scale, is a workshop, a playground, a place for adventures in construction and environmental manipulation, a nature reserve and a food production enterprise, as well as, above all, a human habitat. Nicholson-Lord remarks in his book that 'Britain's fifteen million

gardens, covering an estimated one million acres in England and Wales alone — an area rather larger than the county of Hampshire' — can be called the country's largest nature reserve. And he makes the Morris-like, or Howard-like, or Kropotkin-like, comment: 'Indeed, is not the whole country, managed and manipulated, a gigantic garden?'

In this garden there are millions of houses, and that's where you and I, with our professional or ideological concern with housing, come into the picture of the thinned-out city of tomorrow. I take it for granted that we're not interested in the housing of the affluent, since they have that freedom of choice that enables them to ignore us. I also take it for granted that we have learned that if poor city-dwellers had that access to land, access to credit and security of tenure that are taken absolutely for granted by the better off, they could house themselves by their own action far more effectively and far more cheaply, and with infinitely more dweller-satisfaction, than any outside body, whether it is a public landlord, a private landlord or a Housing Action Trust under the current Housing Bill, could conceivably achieve for them.

We already have a roll-call of successful examples: the housing co-operatives of Liverpool and Glasgow (the first supported by the present Government because the local council opposed them and the second opposed by the present government because the local council supported them), the Lewisham Self-Build Housing Association, the Zenzele Self-Build Housing Co-op in Bristol in which young unemployed Black people aged around 19 successfully housed themselves, the Coin Street Community Builders on the South Bank in London, in an area where it was taken for granted that the site was far too precious to be used for housing ordinary people, and so on.

Our difficulty is to understand why these success stories haven't been emulated on a vast scale all over the country in a thousand similar small-scale ventures. You can attribute this to whatever enemy takes your fancy. You can suggest that there's a capitalist plot against the poor. You can blame it on that immense bureaucratic inertia that profoundly mistrusts anything that people succeed in doing for themselves. Or you can simply say that our fellow citizens haven't grasped the right mental image of the future of cities and consequently can't recognise the positive trends and useful steps that we can see around us, poking up among the cracked concrete paving stones. *We* know what is going on. The purpose of the book, for which I have a handsome income for a year to write, is to show all those people out there.

A talk given in the Summer Lecture Programme of the Hull School of Architecture on 12 May 1988.

George Walford

The Source of Anarchism

How do people come to be anarchists? At first sight this seems an easy one to answer. There may be a few original minds who work it out for themselves, but nearly all newcomers to the movement get their ideas from other anarchists, sometimes in conversation, sometimes by reading. My own experience is probably fairly typical. I was about 18, reading H. G. Wells and Winwood Reade and Bernard Shaw. I thought myself very advanced, but I hadn't got beyond the mildest sort of reformist socialism. Then I happened to meet an anarchist, and within a couple of hours I had been converted. It seems obvious that I became an anarchist because of that chance meeting.¹

But the man I met was an enthusiast for spreading the ideas; over the years he must have tried with scores — probably hundreds — of people, but he succeeded only with me and two or three others. Evidently, talking with him was not sufficient, by itself, to produce an anarchist. There must have been something else, something that predisposed most to reject what he said and a few to accept it.

Similarly with other anarchists and other particular reasons for taking up the position. We say this (or that) made me (or him, or her) an anarchist, but when we look closer we find that this same whatever-it-was happened to a lot of other people who did not cross over. So, again, there must have been something else at work, some source of anarchism apart from individual experience. Something, in fact, that decides what effect individual experience will produce.

Whatever this is, it has been producing substantially the same effects since anarchism started. You can date the beginnings of the movement from Bakunin, or Proudhon, or Godwin, or the Diggers, or farther back still; but, wherever you choose to start, it remains true that since that time anarchism has been a minority movement. Most people don't accept anarchism, and it is mainly the balance of numbers that decides whether we do or do not have an anarchist society. Not whether Thomas, Richard or Henry does or does not become an anarchist, but whether most people do or don't. We have to explain two things: why this movement exists at all, and why it remains in the minority.

In order to get an answer we need to look at the people who accept or support things as they are. Anarchists tend to lump these all in

together, and one can see the reason; there is a significant difference between those who oppose the State and those who don't. I am not saying that this division is unreal, or unimportant, but it's a bit like dividing all animals into elephants and non-elephants; it hides a lot of useful information. As soon as you look at all carefully at the non-anarchists, you find they fall into two groups which are distinguished by having different attitudes towards government.

There are the people in favour of it. These include not just the ones who want to do the governing, but also those who believe that they need to have a government over them — all the people who say things like this:

'An officer is always right, even when he's wrong.'

'Yet not my will, but Thine be done.'

And, perhaps the commonest of them all:

'But you *have* to have somebody to tell people what to do.'

I will call this the *government* group. We just have to remember that it includes not only the rulers and would-be rulers, but also all those who believe that they ought to be ruled.

Next, the other group of non-anarchists. This consists of the people who are not opposed to government but don't particularly support it either. These have their attention focused on their personal and family affairs, on their jobs, children, love-life, sports and other entertainments. They take government for granted, accepting it as a fact of life like gravitation, or the weather. They don't think about the way things might be, they just manage as best they can in the circumstances in which they find themselves. They don't want to be bothered with social affairs, and all they ask of government is that it should not interfere with them too much. Sometimes a government fails to meet this condition, and that is when the revolutions burst out. But as soon as that government has been got rid of, and a new one appears that seems able to manage its affairs better, these people happily go back to their private concerns.

The English Revolution was followed by Cromwell, the French by Napoleon, the Russian by Stalin, the Chinese by Mao, the Cuban by Castro. After every revolution, the rulers return. This happens because the people in this group want to live their private lives without looking outside them, and they find it easier to do that while there is a government running the society. Even when government makes a mess of it, they still find it easier to live with that than to take on the responsibility of managing their own society for themselves.

In social affairs the overriding tendency of this group is to take the less troublesome route, to adapt themselves to circumstances, and there's a name for that sort of behaviour: *expedience*. We all act by

expedience at times; those who belong to the group of which I am now speaking distinguish themselves by doing so consistently, in social and political affairs as well as in their personal lives. I shall call this the *expedient* group.

So we have three political groups; everybody belongs to one or another of them. They don't correspond with class divisions. Each of them includes rich and poor, educated and uneducated, workers and capitalists; and if you want to talk about a middle class, then each group includes members of that, too. Each of them is marked by a number of distinguishing features, but here I shall speak only of their different attitudes towards government. The anarchists oppose it; the government group supports it; the expedient group doesn't care much either way, but usually finds it easier to submit than to resist. The divisions between the groups are not sharp, but this does not make them unreal; there is no sharp division between male and female, but there is a difference, and one that matters.

These are political groups, and whenever you start talking about a political group you need to think about its size, because that mainly decides how much influence it will have. I haven't counted the number of people in each of these three groups, I don't know of anybody who has, and I don't think it can be done. But we don't need to know the exact numbers, only their relative sizes. There can hardly be much doubt that anarchism is the smallest of the three; it is the sizes of the other two we have to think about, and there are several ways of getting at these.

First, go into any big newsagent and look at the books and journals on the shelves. Masses of them on fantasy, fiction, families and homes, sports, hobbies, entertainment, do-it-yourself, and sex. A much smaller number on politics and government, even if you include the more serious newspapers.

Next, look at the figures for general elections. Voters fall into two categories, the first being those who vote the same way, election after election. These are thinking seriously about politics, concerned to find the right answers. They show themselves to belong to the government group.

The other voters do not vote consistently for any party, but this way in one election, another way at the next, as they think will best serve their interests at the time. These people are voting expediently, they belong to our expedient group, and there are so many that when most of them happen to vote the same way it produces 'swings' and 'landslides' that swamp the regular party-supporters.

But that does not yet give the full size of the expedient group. At each general election this century there have been around 20 to 25 per cent of

non-voters; in 1987 the figure was 24.6 per cent. Some few of these will have been anarchists, or others who thought about it and made a conscious decision not to vote, but nearly all were people who did not care enough to go to the polling-booth. These also belong to the expedient group, and when they are put together with the floating voters, it becomes evident that this is the largest group of the three.

Now the next question: How did these groups come about? In order to answer that, we have to go back before the beginnings of history, right back to the time when human beings first appeared. Just when that was depends on what you want to accept as human. If you limit humanity to *Homo sapiens sapiens* it was something over 40,000 years ago. That may seem long enough; but if you prefer to take upright posture as the mark of humanity, that makes it longer still; it takes you back through Neanderthal, Pekinensis and so on, back through all the varieties that preceded *sapiens sapiens*, to the first appearance of *Homo erectus*. It dates the beginnings of the human race about 3 or even 4 million years ago.

Whichever date you choose, it remains true that at that time, and for many thousands of years afterwards, people did not grow their own food; they lived by collecting what grew naturally, and they are known as 'hunter-gatherers'. That's a clumsy term, and it's not accurate, either. With a few exceptions, like the Eskimo, most of these people relied on the roots, nuts and so on gathered by the women rather than on the game hunted by the men. 'Gatherer-hunters' would be more accurate. But that, too, is awkward, so I'm going to use another term, one the anthropologists accept although they don't often use it. I shall call these early people *foragers*.

In one sense the foragers were primitive. They lived at the beginning. But if we feel inclined to look down on them we have to remind ourselves that they founded the first human communities, began the use of fire, used tools in a way the animals do not, and invented language. These things are perhaps the greatest achievements of humanity; we have to treat these people with respect. Hobbes made his sour remarks about their life being nasty and brutal before much had been learnt about them.

The view of the Marxists — that foragers were primitive communists — was mainly based on the ideas of Lewis H. Morgan and put forward in Engels' book, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (1884). It receives little support from more recent work. One modern anthropologist, Elman R. Service, says in *The Hunters* (1966) that it is a superficial view; when you look deeper you find the foraging bands were not communistic. Another, Grahame Clark, says in *Mesolithic*

Prelude (1980) that it is an illusion produced by Victorian pseudo-anthropology.

Our interest lies in the attitude of the foragers towards government, and the most informative thing I can say about this is that they didn't have one. They didn't have government, and they didn't have any definite attitude towards government.

Many anthropologists have lived with foraging peoples. Each of them studies one tribe or people, so to get an authoritative view of foragers generally we have to go to books which summarise the literature, and the best summary I know of the more recent work is Elman R. Service's *The Hunters*. He says that these communities operate by influence rather than authority and, quite explicitly: 'there is no government and no law'; 'there is no leader or headman in the sense usually associated with the word "chief". "Bossiness" is not tolerated, and humility is valued.

The absence of government does not mean that the foragers are defenceless. They suffer from some of the same troubles as we do; they get bullies, delinquents, thieves and habitual liars, and usually find that sanctions applied by the whole community — such as gossip, ridicule and withdrawal — are enough to deal with them. As a last resort, anybody who persists in doing harm that simply cannot be tolerated is likely to be killed, usually by close relatives because that is less likely to start a feud.

Foragers do sometimes accept leaders and organisers, but these are not rulers. Here is Service again:

[The leader] has a very tenuous position. . . . He might serve as adviser, co-ordinator, director and perhaps initiator of specific military actions and/or of occasional and particular economic activities beyond the day-to-day hunting and snaring routine. Also, by virtue of his prestige . . . he might act as the prime opinion-giver in social matters within the band. His 'authority' lay in putting his stamp of approval upon decisions of viewpoints arrived at by the group as a whole. . . . The wise chief or leader had his finger upon the pulse of individual and group opinions. He had to woo others to his way of thinking or, that failing, to alter his course accordingly.

They often had one person leading them in particular undertakings. Some of the Plains Indian tribes would appoint a rabbit-boss when they went after rabbits, and we've all heard of their war-chiefs. But these leaders did not have any coercive force to use and they didn't have any real authority; they depended on personal influence and the willingness of people to follow them. If any person or family chose to go off on their own, there was nothing much the leader could do about it, and as soon as the hunt or the fighting was over the leader's job was finished. Some of the Australian Aborigines had what is sometimes called a council of elders, but these did not form a government in the sense that we know

the government; they were more like respected grandfathers. The anthropologists are definite that the foragers did not have institutional government, a police force or an army. In short, they had no State.

This leads a lot of people to regard them as anarchists, but that view carries consequences its supporters may not have considered. The foraging period was succeeded by the almost world-wide spread of the State, and unless we are going to say this was sent by God, or brought by those little green men from Mars or Venus or wherever, we have to accept that it developed out of the foraging communities. If the foragers were anarchists, it follows that anarchism produced the State.

We need to take account of the difference between *not having* something and *being opposed* to having it. Whatever anarchists may become in future, at present they are not people who live without the State. They *oppose* the State, and the foragers didn't do that. So long as government hadn't been invented, they got along fine without it; but when it appeared, nearly all of them accepted it, and altered their behaviour to fit this new circumstance. They did not act like anarchists, they acted expediently.

You see the connection. The biggest of our three groups, the expedient one, behaves towards government in the same way as the foragers did. From the beginnings of humanity, for tens of thousands of years, perhaps for millions of years, everybody acted in this way, and in our computerised, automated, space-travelling, post-industrial society, with pollution and hydrogen bombs, the expedient group is still the biggest of the three.

Now we move on to the other non-anarchists, the government group. This appeared when government, farming and herding came in, more or less together, about 10,000 years ago. A lot of other things also began about that time: work, warfare, hierarchy, religion, and institutionalised education, for example. Everything, in fact, that goes to make up or support the State. Once government appeared, it spread over almost the whole of the planet, but in doing so it did not eliminate expedience; this is still with us today as the most common attitude. The change was not from expedience to government, but from a community living by expedience alone to a society that displayed both government *and* expedience. Finally, very much later, came our third group, the anarchists.

The history of society can be divided into three main periods, but these are not expedience, government and anarchism. They are: first, expedience; second, expedience with government; third, expedience with government and anarchism. Each attitude continues to exist as the next one appears; we now have all three of them, and there is no indication that the earlier ones are going to vanish or even lose much of

their influence. These successive types of society have not been imposed from without; people formed the expedient communities for themselves, and out of these all later society has developed. Each novelty has emerged from the previous condition without extraneous addition, and the name for that is *evolution*. Society has evolved.

I started by asking why people become anarchists. It looked at first as though it could be traced to something in the personal experience of each one, but we found that, although personal experience was always involved, it could not provide a sufficient explanation. There had to be something else, something that predisposed some people to become anarchists and left the majority unaffected. We can now say that that something is the evolution of society. This is what has produced anarchism, and this is also what produces a majority of non-anarchists.

But we can go farther than that. Society does not float in a vacuum; it is itself the outcome of an evolutionary process, one that begins with the inorganic world and moves through the organic to the human. At least, that is how it's usually put; but that is wrong. What we have now is not just humanity, it is humanity *and* the organic world *and* the inorganic world. Each order of existence continues to exist after the next one has appeared, and the main levels of development have been: first, inorganic; second, inorganic with organic; third, inorganic with organic and human.

Human beings form societies, and social (sometimes called exogenetic) evolution moves so much faster that by comparison with it biological evolution seems to stop. In their biology human beings today are practically the same as the first farmers; it is their society that has developed.

Now we can put together the main stages of the total evolutionary process: first, the inorganic; second, the inorganic with the organic; third, the inorganic with the organic and the human/social (this is the forager stage, the expedient communities); fourth, the inorganic with the organic and expedience and government; fifth, the inorganic with the organic and the human and expedience and government and anarchism. And that, of course, is where we are today. When we spell it out in full, the source of anarchism is the universal process of evolution.

All the way through this universal process, each step to a new level of organisation has been accompanied by a reduction in the number of units. There are fewer atoms than fundamental particles, fewer cells than atoms, fewer multi-cellular creatures than cells, fewer human beings than multi-cellular creatures, fewer supporters of government than expedient people, and fewer anarchists than supporters of government.

This does not, of course, prove that anarchists will remain in the

minority; some new factor may appear that changes the whole set-up. But although 40,000 years of experience, or even 4 million years, do not *prove* anything about the future, we cannot sensibly disregard them. In the absence of equally strong evidence to the contrary, we do have to accept the past as indicating the *probable* future. We have no better guide. If anybody wants to believe that future development will follow a different course from that of the past, that's their privilege; but if they want to put their belief forward as a reasonable one then I suggest the onus is on them to provide evidence to support it.

Note

1. The man I met was a member of the Socialist Party of Great Britain, and it was their version of anarchism I first accepted. Many anarchists do not accept this group as part of the movement because they propose to work through Parliament. But they would use Parliament only to get rid of it. If they were ever to get their majority they would abolish capitalism and the State, and Parliament with them, establishing what they call socialism (which is what other anarchists call anarchism) without any transition period: 'There will be no socialist state. The government over people will give way to the democratically organised administration of things.' (*Socialist Standard*, official journal of the SPGB, October 1984.)

This paper is the text of a talk given to the Anarchist Forum at the Mary Ward Centre, London, on 8 January 1988; minor changes have been made to take account of points made in discussion there.



L. Susan Brown
**Anarchism, Existentialism and Human
Nature: A Critique**

The extent to which anarchist theory and practice have affected the course of human history is not widely appreciated. From the period of its inception back in the middle of the eighteenth century to the present day, the influence of libertarian theory has not been confined solely to those who call themselves anarchists. Non-anarchist communists and other socialists alike have incorporated ideas from thinkers like Proudhon, Bakunin and Kropotkin into their praxis. In the light of the role that anarchists and anarchism have played either directly or indirectly in shaping the course of history, it may prove fruitful to review and criticise anarchist theory from its roots to its contemporary situation.

All political philosophies contain inherent assumptions regarding the 'nature' of the human individual. Sometimes the same assumptions are meant to apply to both men and women; sometimes it is asserted that different assumptions should hold for the two; and there are times when women are excluded completely from the analysis. The way that human nature is conceptualised and the manner in which women fit into such a conceptualisation are related issues that form the foundation of any social theory. All political philosophies are built upon this foundation; hence, if a particular conceptualisation of human nature can be demonstrated to be faulty, then all that is built upon the spurious assumption is suspect and open to challenge. Clearly, an examination of how social theorists conceive of human nature provides a starting-place for immanent critique.

To develop a comprehensive analysis of anarchist political theory, then, it is necessary to lay bare notions of human nature that frequently lie hidden well beneath the surface. By examining both historical and contemporary anarchist theory, I hope to demonstrate that, while certain advances have been made over the years, some recent anarchist thought still clings to outmoded notions about human nature. Consequently, I would like to make some tentative suggestions regarding the creation of a new anarchist political philosophy that abandons nineteenth-century ways of thinking altogether.

In the first section of my paper, I will examine the political writings of three early anarchist theorists: Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Peter

Kropotkin, and Michael Bakunin. Next, I will analyse a more contemporary anarchist writer, Murray Bookchin. Finally, I will propose a synthesis of anarchist and existentialist thought in response to the difficulties inherent in these four writers' work.¹

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: Naturally Social Economic Man

Proudhon published his now famous book, *What is Property?*, in French in 1840. In it, he sets out to prove that property 'is robbery'. He demonstrates that property contradicts the other 'natural rights' of man: liberty, equality, and security. His immanent critique of property is certainly a valuable one; however, the fine details of his argument are not relevant to this investigation. It is rather the assumptions that underlie his argument that demand our attention here.

Proudhon argues that man is inherently social because production is a social act. This is a very powerful argument, as it recognises the *historical* socialness of human beings — a socialness that arises out of the association of human labour. (Marx was to make the same argument nearly thirty years later in *Capital*, where it formed the foundation for his critique of capitalism.)

Proudhon, however, contradicts himself by positing a social *instinct*: Man is moved by an internal attraction towards his fellow, by a secret sympathy which causes him to love, congratulate, and condole; so that, to resist this attraction, his will must struggle against his nature.

Here Proudhon asserts that man is naturally social. Thus, although he lays the foundation for a historical understanding of society (a foundation upon which Marx would later build), Proudhon disregards his own insight and posits a natural social instinct that forever binds humanity together. Proudhon uses this assertion to prove that property, in its anti-socialness, is a contradiction of man's basic social nature.

Proudhon adopts a static approach that cannot adequately explain, for instance, *how* property came about if it is in fact a contradiction of man's basic instincts. Proudhon rather lamely blames the existence of social ills such as property on man's inexperienced faculties of reason: But man acquires skill only by observation and experiment. He reflects, then, since to observe and experiment is to reflect; he reasons, since he cannot help

1. The writers referred to in this paper generally allude to humanity and human beings in sexist gender-specific terms. To substitute non-sexist gender-neutral language when paraphrasing their thought would distort their work, so when referring directly to their ideas I adopt their phraseology.

reasoning. In reflecting, he becomes deluded; in reasoning he makes mistakes, and, thinking himself right, persists in them. . . . Thus, the greatest evils which man suffers arise from the misuse of his social nature, of this same justice of which he is so proud, and which he applies with such deplorable ignorance. The practice of justice is a science which, when once discovered and diffused, will sooner or later put an end to social disorder, by teaching us our rights and duties.

This explanation is problematic; he posits a social human nature, then argues that man, in his ignorance, acts against his own nature. Clearly this is a contradiction in terms: human nature is fixed (man is social), and yet variable (man is anti-social). Proudhon attempts to reconcile these two poles by asserting that clearly 'property is impossible'. In fact, historically property is possible, and as such contradicts Proudhon's *conceptualisation* of human nature — not, as Proudhon would have us believe, human nature itself.

Proudhon looks to science to guide humanity away from ignorance and on to the path of justice. For him, science is the recognition of our true social nature, and he sees his own analysis as contributing to a scientific understanding of the world. This belief in the 'scientific' solution to man's problems is typical of the nineteenth century in which Proudhon lived. It has only been in the twentieth century, in the face of Hiroshima, that science's sovereign claim to truth has been generally questioned. (Of course, Nietzsche questioned the validity of science in the 1880s; however, his criticisms were not generally accepted by the scholars of his time.)

Proudhon's analysis (like that of Marx after him), concentrates only on economic activity undertaken in the public realm. The fact that Proudhon focuses his social criticism solely on this public economic realm results in a complete absence of analysis of the status of women. Thus, when Proudhon uses the term 'man', he is not referring to all of humanity, but rather to men only. He makes this very clear when he states:

Between woman and man there may exist love, passion, ties of custom, and the like; but there is no real society. Man and woman are not companions. The difference of the sexes places a barrier between them, like that placed between animals by a difference of race. Consequently, far from advocating what is now called the emancipation of women, I should incline, rather, if there were no other alternative, to exclude her from society.

This view of women is in keeping with his strictly public realm economic analysis; as it is men who do public realm labour, and men who hold property, the elimination of property will free men. Proudhon is concerned only with the analysis of freedom, equality and security in the public economic realm, which in his day was almost exclusively the sphere of men. Women, for Proudhon, do not enter into

the picture at all. Proudhon is blind to the types of activities women have historically performed. This is the problem with an analysis that ignores all factors outside the public realm of male economic activity; a strictly economic solution (in this case, the abolition of property) is insufficient for the liberation of all people.

For Proudhon, property is the antithesis to communism, the original, naive state of man:

Communism — the first expression of the social nature — is the first term of social development, — the *thesis*; property, the reverse of communism, is the second term, — the *antithesis*. When we have discovered the third term, the *synthesis*, we shall have the required solution.

The solution, according to Proudhon, is anarchy. It is through the elimination of both private property and the state that man will finally express his *natural* socialness. It must be remembered that this 'synthesis' of Proudhon's is based on an analysis that excludes women — it is in fact men and not humanity he is referring to when he speaks of 'man's nature'. It is unclear how a strategy which ignores half the human population could be seen as a solution at all, much less an anarchistic one.

Peter Kropotkin: The Evolution of Mutual Aid

If Proudhon simply asserts a 'social instinct', Peter Kropotkin employs a more sophisticated argument: mutual support is favoured by evolution — as explained in his book *Mutual Aid* (1902). Kropotkin argues that it is not in competition that species survive over time, but rather it is through cooperation that some species gain the edge over others. Kropotkin is unable to explain the origin for such a 'mutual aid' instinct:

That mutual aid is the real foundation of our ethical conceptions seems evident enough. But whatever the opinions as to the first origin of the mutual-aid feeling or instinct may be — whether a biological or a supernatural cause is ascribed to it — we must trace its existence as far back as to the lowest stages of the animal world; and from these stages we can follow its uninterrupted evolution, in opposition to a number of contrary agencies, through all degrees of human development, up to the present times.

To avoid merely positing a social instinct, Kropotkin turns to empirical arguments to demonstrate that human beings are in fact conditioned towards mutual aid by a process of evolution.

Kropotkin supports his evolutionary stance by arguing that this tendency towards mutual aid has been present throughout natural and social history. In fact, in his fervour to prop up his argument, Kropotkin contrives to find the cooperative spirit in nearly all phenomena. For instance, in his pamphlet *The State: Its Historic Role*

(1897) Kropotkin argues that even in medieval Europe mutual aid was practised by the guilds until the establishment of the city allowed the state to emerge. Kropotkin, in the interest of supporting his argument, grossly romanticises the conditions of life and the amount of 'freedom' allowed within the guilds — not to mention the total exclusion of women from his analysis.

With his evolutionary approach, Kropotkin must posit 'necessary stages' to history, which express man's 'natural' inclination to mutual aid. He describes the 'communalist movements that existed in the eleventh and twelfth centuries' as 'a natural development, belonging, just as did the tribe and village community, to a certain phase in human evolution, and not to any particular nation or region'. For Kropotkin, these 'natural developments' are countered by the rise of the state, and hence, the state must be abolished.

We see in the Institution, developed in the history of human societies to prevent the direct association among men, to shackle the development of local and individual initiative, to crush existing liberties, to prevent their new blossoming — all this in order to subject the masses to the will of the minorities.

The state is, then, for Kropotkin, a rather unnatural development that hinders the natural evolution of man. Kropotkin conceptualises 'natural man' as inherently anarchistic, as for him anarchy is simply the absence of the state. However, Kropotkin ignores the fact that the state is a wilful creation of man in the first place; how, then, can the state be unnatural? Would Kropotkin have us renounce our own will (in the form of the state) in order to accept our own nature?

Like Proudhon before him, Kropotkin ignores women, and in so doing naively points to the state as the root of all evil. Even Kropotkin knows that the power of the patriarch precedes the power of the state; however, he does not make the logical conclusion that while the abolition of the state may free men, it may not necessarily free women.

Kropotkin's arguments may appear today as resembling the position of contemporary sociologists. It must be seen that the motivation of Kropotkin and today's sociobiologists are radically different. Kropotkin is countering the assertions of other writers of his time that human beings are 'naturally competitive', that evolution has selected the 'fittest', most competitive species to survive. This position was often taken up by apologists of capitalism: since human beings are naturally competitive, the capitalist system is simply the best arrangement to allow the free expression of human nature. Kropotkin's biologicistic arguments were intended to increase the possibility of human freedom. Sociobiologists, on the other hand, although similarly focusing on biology, are generally unconcerned with human freedom.

However, in opposition to Kropotkin, I would argue that it is

insufficient simply to turn the tables on the Social Darwinists — it is necessary to go beyond asserting a 'human nature' that backs up whatever political stance is deemed desirable. Instead, I will argue against any inherent nature to humanity at all, and propose that we are that which we make of ourselves. This is^{*}certainly a more difficult position to adopt, as it allows us to be not only anarchists, but also capitalists or Fascists. I will take this argument up later; however, first I would like to examine the work of Michael Bakunin and Murray Bookchin.

Michael Bakunin: Anti-Authoritarian Activist

Unlike Proudhon and Kropotkin, Bakunin widens his criticism to include not just private property and the state, but also religion. In his essay, *God and the State*, first published in 1882, Bakunin launches a sustained attack against religion. The denunciation of the existence of God is, for Bakunin, clearly an affirmation of humanity:

The idea of God implies the abdication of human reason and justice; it is the most decisive negation of human liberty, and necessarily ends in the enslavement of mankind, both in theory and practice.

The unrelenting humanism of Bakunin's argument is as moving and relevant today as it was a hundred years ago. He challenges humanity to live in the world without God — that is, without a divine explanation or excuse. Parodying Voltaire, Bakunin claims that 'if God really existed, it would be necessary to abolish him', for there to be human liberty. This humanism is much closer to twentieth-century than it is to nineteenth-century thought; like Nietzsche, Bakunin's radical humanism was not in favour during his time.

Bakunin also parts company with Proudhon and Kropotkin by criticising institutional science. He argues that 'the only mission of science is to enlighten life, not to govern it', and advocates that it must 'represent society's collective consciousness, [and] must really become the property of everybody'. Bakunin challenges authority *as such*, which is a more inclusive approach than that taken by either Proudhon or Kropotkin.

However, like his intellectual forebears, Bakunin argues that human beings are naturally social. For instance, in his discussion of the courage a man must have 'to speak and act against the opinion of all', he states:

Nothing proves this more clearly than this fact the natural and inevitable solidarity — this law of sociability — which binds all men together, as each of us can verify daily, both on himself and on all the men whom he knows.

Bakunin argues that this natural 'law of sociability' cannot prevail so long as our social institutions are based on authority, as is the case with the Church and the state. This again is an argument where the social is understood as 'natural', and repressive institutions are conceptualised as somehow going against nature. This argument does not address the fact that it is human beings themselves who form the Church and the state, and so a contradiction emerges: human beings wilfully act against their own nature. This is a point which Bakunin cannot reconcile, although he certainly tries. For instance, he argues:

The liberty of man consists solely in this: that he obeys natural laws because he has *himself* recognised them as such, and not because they have been externally imposed upon him by any extrinsic will whatever, divine or human, collective or individual.

Bakunin is attempting to reconcile free will with natural law, and I agree with his point only in so far as it applies to physical constraints — or 'laws', as he would term them. The fact of gravity is simply that, a fact, which does not limit our freedom because we understand it as one of the conditions of the material world. I take issue with Bakunin's argument only when he applies it to social situations; then, he is pitting human freedom against 'laws' which ultimately are the creation of human beings themselves. This is clearly a contradiction in terms.

Bakunin does not directly address the issue of women in *God and the State*; the only reference he makes to them is when he rather derisively describes slaves and women as being particularly vulnerable to Christianity because they were 'the two most oppressed, most suffering, and naturally also the most ignorant classes of the ancient world'. Even though he refers to humanity with the masculine term 'man', there is nothing inherent in his analysis that could not equally apply to women. While Proudhon and Kropotkin advocate the abolition of property and the state as the remedy to social inequality, Bakunin points to a much wider problem: authority itself. Although he doesn't address women explicitly, Bakunin's approach is general enough to include their interests implicitly.

Make all needs really solidary, and cause the material and social interests of each to conform to the human duties of each. And to this end there is but one means: Destroy all the institutions of Inequality; establish the economic and social equality of all, and on this basis will arise the liberty, the morality, the solidary humanity of all.

For Bakunin, authority itself must be destroyed. This approach is more useful than simply attacking *one* form of oppression; for instance, it allows for the criticism of newly emerging structures of inequality instead of confining the discussion to just those of which we are currently aware. Thus, while Bakunin does not directly address the oppression of women, clearly his analysis could deal with the issue.

While Bakunin goes beyond Proudhon and Kropotkin by opening up the debate to include the issue of authority *per se*, he still bases his political philosophy on an inherently social human nature. In this way he is like his companions, Proudhon and Kropotkin. Let us now leave these classical anarchist thinkers, and consider a more current libertarian theorist.

Murray Bookchin: Social Ecologist

One of the most pre-eminent of contemporary English-speaking anarchist theorists, Murray Bookchin has considerably influenced the modern anarchist movement. His most important contribution is in bringing ecological issues to the forefront of libertarian thought. In his book *The Ecology of Freedom* (1982), Bookchin launches a detailed analysis of the development of hierarchy where he attempts to ground freedom in an ecological relationship with the natural world. His conception of the 'natural' human being, then, is of 'nature rendered self-conscious'. Human beings are part of nature, and, according to Bookchin, it is to nature that we must look for an ethics:

The matrix from which objective reason may yet derive its ethics for a balanced and harmonised world is the nature conceived by a radical social ecology — a nature that is interpreted nonhierarchically, in terms of unity in diversity and spontaneity.

For Bookchin, nature is a constant movement towards the more complex, towards diversity. Human beings themselves are, according to Bookchin, part of this movement, and are part of the continuum of subjectivities that exist in nature. It is through recognising this natural push for 'unity in diversity' that humanity may ground an ethics of freedom. For Bookchin, then, freedom is the recognition of the right for diversity, both in human and non-human terms.

If freedom is inherent to nature's 'unity in diversity', then how has it come about that humanity lives now in a sense of unfreedom? Bookchin spends a great portion of the book outlining the development of humanity from an initial 'organic community', where hierarchy was unknown, to the present authoritarian world. To do this, Bookchin employs anthropological data in an effort to demonstrate that this original non-hierarchical community actually once existed. This task is, however, a difficult one; the anthropological data are lent to such liberal interpretations that almost anything can be said about so-called 'primitive' societies. Like Kropotkin, Bookchin goes to great lengths to find empirical evidence to support his theory; his anthropology 'documents' humanity's 'natural' push towards a 'unity in diversity'.

Unfortunately, this evidence of 'organic' societies without any hierarchies at all is open to challenge. For instance, Marjorie Cohen argues in her article 'The Significance of the Sexual Division of Labour to Economic Development' (*York Studies in Political Economy*, Spring 1984), that, while a case may be made for the equality of men and women in certain societies, and while

this anthropological evidence may well point to sexual relationships which are different and relatively more egalitarian, to argue that it demonstrates sexual symmetry and full equality is not convincing. . . . While the ethnographic literature is important in that it points to variations in sexual relationships and provides proof to counter the assumption that women always have been passive victims of male dominance, it does not prove that the division of labour by sex (other than for reproduction) is compatible with sexual equality.

Bookchin assumes a 'primal division of labour' by sex even in organic communities, but asserts that such a distinction between men and women is initially non-hierarchical — or, to use Cohen's terminology, symmetrical. Nowhere does he offer convincing evidence to support this assertion. Neither can he offer an explanation for why this 'organic community' developed hierarchies, other than to say that they probably emerged out of a hegemony of old over young, and then spread to the domination of women by men.

Bookchin is indeed arguing on the same grounds as Proudhon and Kropotkin, only he uses slightly different terminology. He assumes not that human beings are naturally social, but rather that in nature they are free. As he is arguing the same tired point, it is no surprise that he gets into trouble. If nature — and, being natural, if humanity — embodies the principle of unity in diversity, then why does humanity *act against nature* by destroying the environment and itself through the exercise of power? Again, we have the same contradiction: a human nature is posited, only to be negated by the acts of real human beings. Bookchin, although perhaps more sophisticated than his nineteenth-century colleagues, stands with one foot squarely planted in the 1800s.

It is clear that certain problematic assumptions about human nature have been made by each of Proudhon, Kropotkin and Bakunin. Furthermore, the contradictions inherent in classical anarchist thought still plague theorists today, as exemplified by the work of Murray Bookchin. It might then be asked whether, if anarchist theory is founded on such unstable ground, it has any utility at all as a political philosophy. In other words, is there anything in anarchist theory that is insightful or helpful? I believe, despite the conceptual problems arising from their assumptions about human nature, that each of the writers discussed above have contributed a great deal to radical social theory.

Proudhon, for example, in his brilliant examination of property, lays

the groundwork for later radical analyses (including Marx's critique of capitalism). By arguing against private property and the state that supports it, Proudhon fights for the right of the freely associated individual, a fight which today non-aligned groups in both East and West have taken up in earnest. This right to free association is part of the intellectual legacy left by Proudhon.

Kropotkin's analysis of mutual aid is likewise a valuable contribution to radical theory. By challenging the hegemony of those theorists who justify capitalism through evolutionary arguments, Kropotkin challenges the very concept of history itself. He shifts the ground of debate; instead of glorifying competition, he concentrates on how human individuals cooperate in day-to-day living. He shows that resistance to alienation is possible.

Bakunin generalises the anarchist stance against state authority to include opposition to all authority. This is a very important theoretical step, as it allows anarchism to address many issues about which 'mainstream' leftists are silent. Age, race or sex hierarchies, for example, can be challenged using Bakunin's imperative to question authority.

Bookchin's analysis of nature points to a conceptualisation of anarchism that is more comprehensive yet. He argues that '*if the object of capitalism or socialism is to increase needs, the object of anarchism is to increase choice*'. That Bookchin looks to nature's 'unity in diversity' to justify this notion is internally inconsistent; however, his conclusion is still a valuable one. Not only is anarchism a negative moment of destruction, but Bookchin shows that it is a positive creative moment as well.

Thus, while these four anarchist thinkers encounter problems that emerge out of their insistence to posit a human nature, they all point to the freedom of the individual as the necessary basis for a good society. This emphasis on freedom is what makes anarchism still meaningful today.

Anarchism and Existentialism

From Proudhon, Kropotkin, Bakunin and Bookchin, there comes the insistent cry for freedom; however, this cry is coupled with an idealist conception of the human individual — namely, that human beings have a nature and that that nature is social. I have argued above that by assuming a human nature, these thinkers have encountered logical difficulties. In this section I would like to demonstrate that it is necessary not to reconcile human nature with anarchism, as has

conventionally been attempted, but rather to abandon the notion of human nature entirely. This tack is necessary because, as human nature and human freedom are irreconcilable, the assertion of a human nature makes the expression of free will problematic. Without a capacity for free will, the possibility of anarchism is nonsense. Or, to put it in other terms, anarchy is possible only because of humanity's capacity freely to make meaning of itself and its world.

As the existentialists assert, humanity creates itself — or, to quote Jean-Paul Sartre's *Existentialism and Human Emotions* (1957), 'existence precedes essence'. Through our own actions, we create our own, always changing, human nature. The argument is not that anarchism can work because human beings are 'naturally' cooperative or responsible, but rather that anarchism is possible because we have the freedom to create ourselves. Of course, we may choose not to become anarchists: we may instead choose to be Fascists or capitalists. The point is that we choose, whether we want to or not, whether we acknowledge our choice or not, and that therefore we are responsible for who we are.

The affinity of anarchism and existentialism is not often noted, although a few writers have recognised the complementarity of the two streams of thought. For instance, in *Living My Life* (1931), Emma Goldman argues with a friend who has accused Nietzsche of being an aristocrat:

Nietzsche was not a social theorist but a poet, a rebel and an innovator. His aristocracy was neither of birth nor of purse; it was of the spirit. In that respect Nietzsche was an anarchist, and all true anarchists were aristocrats.

More recently, Herbert Read explicitly argues in his 1949 pamphlet, *Existentialism, Marxism and Anarchism*, for the compatibility of anarchism and existentialism:

If finally you ask me whether there is any necessary connection between this philosophy and anarchism, I would reply that in my opinion anarchism is the *only* political theory that combines an essentially revolutionary and contingent attitude with a philosophy of freedom. It is the only militant libertarian doctrine left in the world, and on its diffusion depends the progressive evolution of human consciousness and of humanity itself.

Read argues that existentialism is a humanism that is an 'affirmation of the significance of our human destiny'. It is a philosophy that allows for the creation of meaning. Existentialism also allows us to shift the grounds of debate away from 'human nature' with all its attendant problems, towards a consideration of *how* we can create freedom for ourselves and others. According to Read, existentialism is eliminating all systems of idealism, all theories of life or being that subordinate man to an idea, to an abstraction of some sort. It is also eliminating all systems of materialism that subordinate man to the operation of physical and economic laws. It is saying that man is the reality — not even man in the

abstract, but the human person, you and I; and that everything else — freedom, love, reason, God — is a contingency depending on the will of the individual.

This approach avoids the contradictions and limitations encountered by those theorists who assume a human nature by allowing for an infinite variety of possibilities, including anarchy. In addition, not only does existentialism prove useful in the development of a coherent social theory, but also one may argue that it is empirically true. As history shows us, human beings act in any number of ways — at times we are cruel, brutal and violent, but we also exhibit love to one another and practise altruism.

Existentialism, then, is a philosophy that allows for the possibility of anarchism by providing it with an ethical basis. In its stress on freedom, existentialism provides anarchism with an ethic or freedom. As Simone de Beauvoir states in *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948):

We have to respect freedom only when it is intended for freedom, not when it strays, flees itself, and resigns itself. A freedom which is interested only in denying itself must be denied. And it is not true that the recognition of the freedom of others limits my own freedom: to be free is not to have the power to do anything you like; it is to be able to surpass the given toward an open future; the existence of others as a freedom defines my situation and is even the condition of my own freedom. I am oppressed if I am thrown into prison, but not if I am kept from throwing my neighbour into prison.

She offers an ethic of freedom coupled with responsibility — a freedom which depends on the freedom of everybody. Thus action is undertaken not only because it opens up freedom for oneself, but because it increases the freedom of all. This echoes the same sentiment expressed by Bookchin quoted above: '*The object of anarchism is to increase choice*'. It is the centrality of human freedom which ultimately binds the existentialist to the anarchist.

By accepting an ethic based on existentialism, the grounds for debate are now changed; instead of discussing what constitutes human nature and what limitations that nature imposes, we can now focus on what constitutes human freedom and how that freedom can be expanded. Anarchism and existentialism can together offer new ways of thinking and acting that are appropriate for a future where all human beings are free.

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The Spies for Peace and after

The Spies for Peace episode at Easter 1963 was one of the most successful single actions of the old Nuclear Disarmament movement. It is described here in some detail partly to preserve the memory of such a dramatic event in the recent history of the British left and partly to consider what lessons may still be drawn from it. First let us summarise the achievement, purpose and significance of the people who called themselves the Spies for Peace.

Their main achievement was to make public the secret plans of the authorities for an emergency regional government of the country in the case of nuclear warfare—or of political breakdown. Until they took a hand, these plans were known only to the relatively few people involved and were deliberately concealed from the wider population in whose name (and at whose expense) they had been made. A combination of the criminal law, embodied in the Official Secrets Acts, and of bureaucratic tradition, supported by the media, meant that not only possibly damaging military information but perfectly innocuous civilian material was surrounded by an elaborate curtain of security, and that the only public references to the system were guarded hints in the press.

Their main purpose was not to render assistance to any enemy country or subversive organisation, but to provide this information to the general public and at the same time to reinforce the argument of the Nuclear Disarmament movement that the official preparations for a future war were directed against rather than towards the welfare of ordinary people.

Their main significance was to show that a small underground group could take effective direct action against the power of the establishment, discover and distribute secret information very widely, avoid detection and punishment, and through such propaganda by both word and deed set an example for subsequent exposure of more such material.

Crisis in the Committee of 100

The Spies for Peace had nothing to do with any foreign power or any Marxist party, but were a group of libertarian activists in the Committee of 100.

The old Nuclear Disarmament movement—like all reformist or revolutionary movements—tended from its beginnings soon after the Second World War to be polarised between moderates, who favoured constitutional action through conventional demonstrations and pressure on Parliament, and radicals, who favoured direct action through unconventional demonstrations and pressure from the people. The moderates were represented by a series of organisations culminating at the beginning of 1958 in the formation of the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament, which had broad support but was run by a small group of political activists, mainly associated with the Labour Party and later also with the Communist Party. The radicals were represented by a series of organisations leading at the end of 1957 to the formation of the Direct Action Committee Against Nuclear War, which organised small-scale non-violent demonstrations and won little support for a couple of years, and culminating at the end of 1960 in the formation of the Committee of 100, which organised a series of large-scale non-violent demonstrations and won considerable support for a couple of years. The Committee of 100 was particularly successful in attracting radicals both from the old revolutionary left and from the New Left which had emerged during the late 1950s as well as old pacifists and new anti-militarists, and also in combining the long tradition of popular protest and resistance with the fresh techniques of non-violent civil disobedience.

By the end of 1962, however, the Committee of 100 was in serious and worsening difficulties. The original Committee was based in London, where it held its meetings and maintained a paid staff in a permanent office. Its success during 1961 led to such increase in support all over the country that at the beginning of 1962 it was replaced by a dozen regional Committees, which took over the organisation of action, very loosely coordinated by a federal National Committee of 100, which took over the existing staff and office and the organisation of national meetings in various parts of the country. (The development of a bureaucracy was prevented by the authorities through frequent arrests of leading officials!)

This process of devolution increased local autonomy and activity but weakened the sense of unity and direction of the original Committee. At the same time the imprisonment for twelve or eighteen months of six of its most active leaders in February 1962 (for organising its most ambitious demonstrations at Wethersfield and several other places on 9 December 1961) weakened the sense of confidence and courage of the whole radical wing of the Nuclear Disarmament movement. The various Committees were increasingly divided by theoretical arguments about non-violence and direct action and broader political aims and by

practical arguments about how to regain the initiative and how to restore the sense of identity.

Meanwhile the moderate wing of the movement, represented by CND, was dominated by the need to remain respectable and acceptable in the face of the temporary success of the Committee of 100, and there was considerable discontent among the rank and file over its activity. Its major new policy statement, *Steps Towards Peace* (which was drafted by the New Left leader Stuart Hall and issued in November 1962), was widely considered to betray the cause of unilateralism, and the plan to hold yet another conventional march from Aldermaston to London at Easter 1963, without any radical demonstrations on the way or a dramatic climax at the end, was similarly considered to ignore the developments of the past two years.

The problems of the Committee of 100 were most acute in London. The London Committee, which was inaugurated on 1 April 1962, was by far the largest single organisation in the movement. It was the only one apart from the National Committee itself to maintain paid staff and a permanent office, and it also had a Working Group which met every week and a local convenor system. But it was the most deeply troubled. After the last demonstration organised by the original Committee of 100—a sit-down in Parliament Square on 24 March 1962—it proved impossible to organise a major demonstration in London, other than emergency actions arising from sudden international events (such as the American and Russian nuclear tests in April and August and the Cuba crisis in October). The London Committee decided at its second meeting, on 13 May, to organise a large-scale sit-down in Whitehall for 9 September; but as late as 2 September this had to be cancelled because of lack of support (only 4,000 pledges were received, against a target of 7,000) and reorganised as a conventional demonstration two weeks later. All of the most important Committee of 100 demonstrations during this period were organised outside London—by the Scottish Committee (at Holy Loch on 10 June), by the Oxford Committee (at Greenham Common on 23-24 June), and by the East Anglian Committee (at Honington on 20 October)—though most of the participants in the last two came from the London region. The most successful of all took place outside Britain—in the Red Square in Moscow, when members of the Committee of 100 held a public meeting during the World Disarmament Conference on 13 July.

The position had been made still more serious by the failure of the Committee of 100 generally to respond adequately to the Cuban Missile crisis in October 1962, when neither the non-aligned policy nor the non-violent methods of the Committee made much impact. The famous people who had made up most of the original Committee of 100

dropped out—culminating in the resignation of Bertrand Russell in November 1962, when the London Committee dissociated itself from his biased position during the Cuba crisis. Meeting after meeting failed to decide the crucial issues of 'future action' because the membership was so deeply divided over the basic issue of what kind of action was appropriate once 'sit-downs' had lost their novelty. The other regional Committees became increasingly impatient with the state of the London Committee—as a meeting of the National Committee of 100 in London on 18-19 August noted tactfully, 'It was generally agreed that the London Cttee should be regarded as in a state of transition'—and also with the weakness of the National Committee.

This critical situation in the Committee of 100 was the scene of the development of the Spies for Peace, who emerged from the London Committee during the long, cold winter of 1962-1963.

Beyond Counting Arses

At the end of 1962 the London Committee of 100 provisionally planned another large-scale sit-down in Central London for 12 May 1963, but it proved impossible to settle the details and even to confirm the principle of such a demonstration. At the beginning of 1963 this became the symbol of the deepening crisis in the Committee movement. On 14 January a meeting of the London Working Group revealed strong dissatisfaction with the planned demonstration; there was a close vote to cancel it, and a general feeling that there should be a major demonstration before Easter, but no agreement about what to put in its place. On 21 January the London Committee held an emergency meeting to discuss the issue. The circumstances were particularly unfortunate: Helen Allegranza—a popular member of the Committee, the only woman among the six imprisoned leaders, and the new secretary of the National Committee—was found dead that day, and the news of her suicide cast a shadow over the whole meeting; and a power-cut that evening meant that it had to be held in virtual darkness as well as extreme cold.

The 3½-hour meeting was dominated by bitter disagreements, which were not resolved by a series of decisions to go ahead with the 12 May demonstration as an orthodox 'public assembly' culminating in a traditional sit-down, and also to hold a march to Parliament on Budget Day, 3 April. A small group of members present who were strongly opposed to these decisions felt that it had become essential to make some kind of collective stand which would bring home to the Committee leaders and officials that the rank and file of the movement was dissatisfied with such an unimaginative approach. They met at a

pub immediately after the meeting and then at a Soho restaurant three days later, and began a series of frequent meetings to decide how to take the next appropriate opportunity to explain their dissident position and to influence their colleagues. They were begged by the officials of the National and London Committees and other leading figures not to harm the movement, but they decided that the situation had gone beyond polite disagreement and demanded much more radical dissent.

An appropriate opportunity arose immediately. On 9-10 February there was a national Way Ahead conference in London—the first of many — to consider the future of the Committee of 100. It was in effect a general meeting of the radical Nuclear Disarmament movement, most of those present being deeply unhappy in various ways about the way things were going but equally unable to agree about the way to improve them. As usual, nothing concrete emerged from the weekend's talk; but a paper was presented to the conference by the dissident group which defined once and for all the oppositionist line against the accepted forms of Committee activity—especially against the obsessions with non-violence, openness, symbolic actions, arrests, names, respectability, and so on.

The paper took the form of a duplicated eight-page quarto pamphlet called *Beyond Counting Arses*, written by one member of the group on the basis of its discussions and signed by eight others, dated 6 February and circulated on 7 February. It began by describing the confusion in the Nuclear Disarmament movement in general and in the Committee of 100 in particular, singling out 'the lack of common ground among its members and supporters' and its organisational chaos. It pungently expressed total dissatisfaction with the established policy of limping from sit-down to sit-down, relying on 'the number of arrested arses' and the length of the press reports to keep the whole process going. It insisted that the most significant demonstrations during the previous year—such as that in Moscow's Red Square in July 1962 and some of those in London during the Cuba crisis in October 1962—had taken place 'in spite of rather than through the Committee's normal structure'. It dismissed 'the perennial back-to-the-womb suggestion for a mass sit-down in Whitehall'. It listed the assets of the Committee of 100—its past reputation, its experience of illegal activity, and the commitment of its members—and it called for a deliberate continuation of 'radical action' and also a move forward into more consciously subversive activity. The general proposal was that 'we must attempt to hinder the warfare state in every possible way'.

Three ways of doing this were suggested. The first was a campaign of 'Civil Disobedience in Print'—to 'unmask and publicise the most secret preparations of the Warfare State . . . publish the location of

rocket bases and what goes on in the germ warfare centres . . . give details about the secret hide-outs of "civil" defence—and the secretly kept lists of those who will be catered for in the event of nuclear war . . . publish the names of the emergency government "gauleiters" and details of phone-tapping and of the activities of the Special Branch'.

The general position laid down was as follows:

As recent events have shown, the Official Secrets Act does not really function to prevent espionage, but to keep the facts from the people of this country. There can be little information that a foreign power cannot obtain by bribery, blackmail or plain observation. We propose that the Committee should deliberately take the lid off these facts, and let people know what the state does in their name. It is clear that activities of this sort would have to involve certain measures of secrecy, analogous to those practised by VND [the Voice of Nuclear Disarmament, the pirate radio system loosely associated with the Committee of 100].

Various other forms of action were proposed or suggested, and the paper ended with the following conclusion: 'We do not believe in passive martyrdom. We are not in this movement to opt out of a burden on our consciences but to fight for what we believe in.'

The discovery of RSG-6

Beyond Counting Arses had no effect on the conference itself, though it irritated or impressed many of those who read it. In the light of this situation, the group—reinforced by some new members who were interested in putting its proposals into practice—decided that if it couldn't influence the Committee movement by argument it would have to do so by action, either by a small but dramatic demonstration of its own or else by the organisation of a mass demonstration which it could prepare and then present to the movement as a *fait accompli*. In either case, it was felt necessary to bypass the inevitable bottle-neck of prolonged discussion and persistent dissent in the Committee by doing whatever had to be done themselves.

On 15 February the group considered various possible actions—to sabotage the parliamentary debate on the Defence White Paper on 4-5 March or the Budget speech on 3 April, whether by interrupting the debate or by disrupting it with the release of some noxious substance from the public gallery (the latter plan was eventually put into effect seven years later, when a CS gas canister was thrown into the chamber in July 1970); to organise a 'sleep-out' in the Reading streets or a 'sleep-in' at the Reading Town Hall on the first night of the Aldermaston March, in protest against the Council's threat to refuse accommodation

to the marchers; or else to organise some kind of diversion of the March at a suitable place along the route.

At this point in the discussion it was remembered that political contacts in Reading had once mentioned someone knowing someone who had worked at a secret bunker near the town. This seemed worth following up, so on 16 February four members of the group drove to Reading. The contacts confirmed that the person in question had been a workman employed on installing equipment in an underground bunker just off the A4, the Reading-London main road—that is, the route of the Aldermaston March on its second day. On the strength of this information they immediately searched the whole area. After many hours of driving over ice-covered roads and tramping over snow-covered fields in the middle of the worst winter for years, at the end of the afternoon they finally found what they assumed must be the place, at the east end of the village of Warren Row, a couple of miles off the main road, eight miles out of Reading. They climbed over the low bank by the locked gate to have a closer look. They took photographs of the general view of the place, the ramp, the air filters, the electric cables, the radio masts, and so on. They were just about to leave when one of them tried the boiler-house door and found that it was unlocked. They went in, looked around, and were about to go out again when they noticed another door, which was also unlocked; it led to a steep staircase which led down into a huge office complex. They rushed down, took a quick look round, grabbed what papers they could find on a desk and a notice-board near the entrance, saw from the visitors' book that the boiler-man was due to call in half an hour, and rushed out again.

On 17 February the London Committee of 100 yet again considered future action, and after another long discussion finally decided to cancel the proposed demonstration on 12 May in favour of supporting a demonstration organised by the East Anglian Committee of 100 at the Marham nuclear base on 11 May. But by this time it was too late for the group to be diverted from its own activity, and anyway this decision, though welcome, seemed only to confirm that the London Committee was still unable to do anything on its own account.

The Spies for Peace

On 20 February the whole group held a crucial meeting to discuss what had happened and to decide what to do next. They first heard a rough account drafted by one of them of what the papers revealed—that they had discovered a Regional Seat of Government (called RSG-6), only about 20 minutes' walk from the Aldermaston route—and they examined the photographs which had been taken. This seemed to be an

opportunity beyond their wildest dreams, but before taking it they had to consider its implications. All the members present said in turn what they should now do. The overwhelming majority agreed that they should independently produce a pamphlet about RSG-6 on the basis of the material discovered in Warren Row, and secretly distribute it to the movement in time for the Aldermaston March seven weeks ahead, in the hope that there would be a major demonstration at the site.

There was some disagreement from a small minority, who argued either that such an action would tend to wreck the Committee of 100 and that the function of the group should continue to be that of an open pressure-group within the Committee rather than become a secret cell outside on its own, or else that such an action, however desirable it might seem, would inevitably lead to the arrest and imprisonment of those responsible. After a long discussion, the group decided to go ahead, and the minority left the meeting and took no further part in the group's activities. At the same time the group decided to exclude its more prominent and vulnerable members from direct participation, though they would be kept informed of progress, and also not to include any more members for the time being, except to approach outsiders on a 'need-to-know' basis for any necessary help with particular details. The people who remained active members of the group at this stage became the Spies for Peace.

There were eight of them, all in their twenties. They were mostly men with middle-class backgrounds, though two were women (one of whom was pregnant) and two were working-class in origin. Several of them were drop-outs from the educational system, though two of them had Oxbridge degrees. Between them they had one small car and the use of a delivery van. They had all been active in the Committee of 100 in various ways—some of them as full-time workers or local convenors or members of the Industrial Sub-Committee—and they had all been arrested on demonstrations several times. Most of them had previous experience of left-wing politics covering all kinds of groups—CND or the New Left, student or trade unions, Labour or Communist Party, Trotskyist or anarchist organisations—and between them they had a wide circle of contacts all over the country (their closest connections outside the Nuclear Disarmament movement being with the new Solidarity group and the old Freedom group). They had got to know each other well during the previous year or two, and now shared both a personal commitment to radical action and also a common acceptance of libertarian socialism (though hardly any of them would have called themselves anarchists).

Having decided to produce a pamphlet, they had to settle several other questions. The next decision they made was that the pamphlet

should be produced in conditions of complete security, to minimise the chances of the authorities being able either to interrupt their work before it was complete or of catching them afterwards. They were prepared to take necessary risks, but not to offer themselves up for sacrifice. They took into special account the experience of the publication of an analogous official secret five years earlier.

The *Isis* case

When the Second World War was followed by the Cold War between Communist Russia and the West, the American and British governments (joined by Canada, Australia and New Zealand) made a secret treaty in 1947 known as the United Kingdom United States of America Security Agreement (UKUSA). This established a joint system of Signals Intelligence (SIGINT), concentrating on the surveillance of Russian military radio traffic from bases in Europe and the Middle East. Many of the radio operators involved were National Servicemen taught Russian or Morse and trained as radio operators, who returned to civilian life—many going on to university—and were a potentially weak link in the security network.

During the 1950s there were several occasions when American and British aircraft and ships made deliberate incursions across the Iron Curtain in order to provoke radio traffic and provide valuable information. This activity was of course top secret, but it was obviously known to the Russians, and on a few occasions they retaliated by attacking and even destroying American or British aircraft, and the resulting international incidents led to considerable publicity and consequent embarrassment. This episode is described in a recent book on the subject by 'Nigel West' (the Conservative MP, Rupert Allason)—*GCHQ: The Secret Wireless War, 1900-86* (1986)—in a chapter with the appropriate title 'Russian Adventures'.

The British authorities generally managed to cover up the significance of such incidents, but on one occasion their cover was blown. On 26 February 1958 a special H-Bomb issue of the Oxford student paper *Isis* included a short article called 'Frontier Incidents—Exposure', which described the SIGINT system and explained the frontier incidents.

... All along the frontier between east and west, from Iraq to the Baltic, perhaps farther, are monitoring stations, manned largely by National Servicemen trained in morse or Russian, avidly recording the least squeak from Russian transmitters—ships, tanks, aeroplanes, troops and control stations. It is believed, perhaps rightly, that this flagrant breach of the Geneva Convention can provide accurate estimates of the size and type of Russian armaments and troops, and the nature of their tactical methods.

In order to get this information the West has been willing to go to extraordinary lengths of deception. British Embassies usually contain monitoring spies. When the Fleet paid a 'goodwill' visit to Danzig in 1955 they were on board. And since the Russians do not always provide the required messages they are sometimes provoked.—A plane 'loses' its way; while behind the frontier tape recorders excitedly read the irritated exchanges of Russian pilots: and when the latter sometimes force the aeroplane to land an international incident is created, and reported in the usual fashion. . . .

In a moment of crisis irresponsibility of this kind could well frighten the Russians into war. Certainly if Russian planes were to fly over American bases the American reply would be prompt. But there is no controlling the appetite of the statistical analysers at Cheltenham. . . .

The point of the article was of course that such incidents were more likely to cause than prevent war, and that such information should be made available to the British people as well as the Russian authorities. The authors were two undergraduates who had worked in SIGINT during their recent National Service in the Navy. The article was not signed, but security at *Isis* was poor, and the British authorities soon took their revenge. In March the office was raided and the editor interrogated, and Paul Thompson and William Miller were charged under the Official Secrets Act. They were tried at the Central Criminal Court in July, and after a deal with the prosecution they pleaded guilty and were sentenced to three months' imprisonment (they went on to distinguished careers in academic history and serious publishing respectively). The offending article was immediately reprinted as a leaflet by the Universities & Left Review Club, the main organisation of the New Left in London, so the information was widely distributed, at least on the left; but the fate of the victims was a warning of the possible price to be paid for such activity, and the Spies for Peace were determined not to make the same mistakes. (Nigel West's account of this episode is very inaccurate.)

Danger! Official Secret RSG-6

The group then turned to the problem of whether they needed more material for the pamphlet. After further discussion of the risks to be taken and the advantages to be gained, they agreed that another visit to Warren Row was indeed necessary to obtain more information and to make the pamphlet more detailed and convincing. After leaving the material already collected with a sympathetic anarchist who worked in a Communist bookshop in London, they made careful preparations for a second visit to Warren Row on 23 February (a day when there were meetings of both the National Committee and the London Committee in London).

Four members of the group drove to Reading again, checked that the site was clear—noting with interest that there were workmen there during the day, even though it was a Saturday—and then spent the evening in a pub and watched the satirical late-night television programme *That Was The Week That Was* before returning to search the bunker at leisure. They arrived after midnight, picked the lock of the boiler-house door (which was shut this time) and spent several hours inside the installation. They found to their astonishment that the RSG was fully operational—the electricity and water were on, there were notices on the boards, signs in the corridors, maps on the walls, directories in the telephone exchange, desks and cabinets in the offices, and papers in the drawers. It was clear that nothing had been touched since it was last used during the NATO exercise Fallex 62 five months before—except that for some reason all the ashtrays had been locked up in an office.

First they explored the whole place, and then they specialised in various activities—one transcribed documents, one traced maps, one took photographs, and one ransacked every room. They took the greatest care to leave no trace of their visit. They wore gloves the whole time; they broke no locks, picking those they had to open; they took away only those papers which had duplicates, and copied those which hadn't; they photographed the signs and maps, and copied the plan of the bunker from a wall-chart. When they had finished, they put everything back in its place and left with a suitcase full of papers and a camera full of pictures. This technique was clearly successful, for when the pamphlet appeared both the authorities and the media assumed that an insider must have made some kind of deliberate leak rather than that some outsiders had simply broken into a sensitive and insecure installation and found all the necessary material right there in situ.

The material taken from Warren Row was looked after by the same bookshop assistant for a few days, just in case anyone had noticed anything. The group met again on 25 February and discussed the new material they had now obtained. Its significance lay not only in that it included far more information about the RSG system—including the locations of all the other RSGs and the identities of the staff of RSG-6 (and also of RSG-4 in Cambridge)—but that in addition it included detailed information about the disastrous results of two recent Civil Defence exercises—Parapluie in Spring 1962 and Fallex 62 in September. The latter had already been the subject of dramatic disclosures in October 1962 by the West German news magazine *Der Spiegel*, which had immediately been prosecuted by the authorities. The group decided that the pamphlet should contain as much information

as possible about both aspects of their discoveries, and they immediately set to work to produce it.

They met regularly every Monday evening—that is, at the same time as the Working Group of the London Committee of 100, on the assumption that any likely surveillance would be diverted elsewhere—with more frequent contacts between various individual members in between. Six members lived within walking distance of each other in Hampstead, and the meetings took place in one or other of their three flats. A constant rule was that every single action involved in the operation must have a complete cover story which sounded convincing and could be checked. Another was that the absolute minimum of material was to be kept in writing or said on the telephone. Everything was decided at the meetings, and nothing was recorded. The procedure was completely informal, with no set structure. Decision were taken by consent rather than vote. (As is so often the case, those who did the most talking tended to do the least work.)

The first task was to write the text of the pamphlet. One member of the group prepared a rough draft based on the material from Warren Row, filled out by research in a reference library, completing it on 15 March; a second member then expanded this into a longer draft, adding the postscript, by 18 March; a third member then polished this into a final draft, adding the foreword, by 23 March. During the same period three other members drew out maps and developed the photographs. The text and form of the pamphlet were discussed and agreed by the whole group on 25 March. All the material taken or copied from Warren Row was then burnt, apart from the photographs.

The pamphlet was planned as follows. The group took the dramatic title 'Spies for Peace', partly as a serious shorthand summary of their position, and partly as a frivolous joke at the expense of the Communist front organisations which used such titles. The pamphlet was to be typed and duplicated (those were the days before personal computers and cheap photo-copying), since this could be done with the least trouble and the least risk. It was to be foolscap size, to minimise the number of stencils and the quantity of paper needed. It would have twelve pages, including four electro-stencils for illustrations. The only photograph used would be that of the outside of the RSG, so that there would be no indication that anyone had been inside it. There would be 4,000 copies, the maximum number stencils would run to. The pamphlet was given the inelegant but striking title *Danger! Official Secret RSG-6* as a way of catching people's attention in the flood of papers and pamphlets always produced at Easter. The front page consisted of the title with the picture of RSG-6 (photographed in the snow). The text began with a short introduction, then described the

DANGER !
OFFICIAL-
SECRET



IRSG-6

THE BUILDINGS OF THE CAMP

The compound has a pretty extensive network of National Social and Communist cells for the time being. The cells are for the most part in the hands of the British and the Americans. The cells are in the hands of the British and the Americans. The cells are in the hands of the British and the Americans.

The buildings and the other buildings of the camp are as follows: (1) and (2) are the main buildings.

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THE CAMP

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RSG system, giving the locations (and telephone numbers) of all the known RSGs, described both the outside and inside of RSG-6, adding a list of its main personnel and a plan of its lay-out, described the two exercises, adding that the RSGs hadn't been activated during the Cuba crisis in October 1962 (with the comment that 'in the face of a real emergency, fuck all was done'), and ended with a conclusion, adding on the back page a map of the area with the suggestion of a demonstration there during the Aldermaston March.

The group calculated that the whole operation would cost about £100—about £1,000 today—which they knew they couldn't afford but thought they could probably raise. They decided to go ahead and see about recovering some of their costs from people who could afford it when they had something definite to show them. They bought a cheap old Underwood typewriter, and one member cut the nine text stencils; the electro-stencils were made by taking the photograph and the maps into a commercial firm in the normal way. By the time all this was ready, they realised that they had only enough time and would probably have only enough money for 3,000 copies after all. They then bought ink, staples, envelopes, wrappers and labels in the normal way. They obtained the paper through a sympathetic anarchist who worked in a pacifist bookshop in London and was able to supply the necessary three dozen reams of duplicating paper without awkward questions being asked. All this material was handled only with gloves at every stage; the coldness of the weather fortunately made this particular precaution seem nothing unusual.

Right up to the last moment they expected the pamphlet to be ignored by the mass media, so it was important to distribute it as widely and effectively as possible. Also every single copy—including their own — had to be sent out by post so that there would be no trace of their origin. About 2,000 copies were to be sent to people likely to be on the Aldermaston March and likely to know what to do—the members of the group themselves, other members of the Committee of 100 (bundles going to secretaries of Regional Committees and convenors of local Working Groups), people known to be sympathetic with the Committee of 100 in CND, Youth CND, the Young Socialists, and the New Left. Copies were also to go to all left-wing papers and magazines. This would at least ensure good publicity in the Nuclear Disarmament movement.

The other 1,000 copies were to go to people who might give it another kind of publicity, whatever happened on the March—national newspapers and magazines, Government ministers and Opposition leaders, right-wing Conservative and left-wing Labour MPs, civil servants, and a long list of 'progressive' celebrities in this country and abroad taken from *Who's Who*. Copies were also sent to key people in

the area of southern England covered by RSG-6—local papers, local councillors, local government officials, constituency Labour Party and trade union branch secretaries, army officers, religious ministers, university dons, and, of course, the people listed on the staff of the RSG itself. One copy was sent to the British Museum, but it never appeared in the catalogue. Later a senior member of the Reading Room staff attempted to obtain a copy, but the person he approached refused to supply one if its availability was going to be restricted; no agreement was reached, so no copy was produced.

By the weekend before Easter, 6-7 April, everything was just ready. Some members of the group then showed typescripts of the final draft of the pamphlet to people they knew personally who had previously given money to the Committee of 100 and were likely to be sympathetic but not inquisitive. One former 'name' in the Committee gave £50, two others gave £10; one relatively rich surviving member of the Committee gave £25. This was just enough. The typescripts were then burnt.

Incidentally, Bertrand Russell did not give any money, though he intended to do so and even believed that he had done so. In the relevant passage of *The Autobiography of Bertrand Russell*, he described the work of the Spies for Peace and added: 'They had no funds, and appealed to me. I gave them £50 with my blessing' (Volume 3, p. 125). An approach was indeed made to contacts on Russell's staff, but the answer was that while Russell approved of the project he couldn't contribute to it financially—though the contacts themselves made a small contribution. Only later was it discovered that Russell had actually authorised a payment of £50, which had been prevented by Ralph Schoenman, the most powerful member of the staff.

The final production of the pamphlet was completed during the week before Easter. The sheets were run off on the *Solidarity* duplicator in the premises of the Independent Labour Party in King's Cross Road, a building used by several left-wing organisations known to the group who wouldn't ask any questions. The work took from Sunday to Tuesday, the members taking turns as they could. At the same time the hundreds of labels were typed on the same typewriter. The sheets were assembled and wrapped and labelled in one of their flats from Tuesday evening to Wednesday afternoon, the members again taking turn as they could, some working right through the night and the next day. The stamps were bought in several Hampstead post offices, and again handled only with gloves. On the Wednesday afternoon they began posting the pamphlet at various places all over London, first the bundles being taken from post office to post office in the delivery van and then the envelopes being taken from post-box to post-box in the car.

Before all the thousands of packets could even be sorted, let alone

delivered, the incriminating material was being destroyed. Everything that could be burnt was burnt. Of the things that couldn't, the typewriter was thrown into a river outside London, and—as a last touch of political malice—the cardboard boxes were left in dustbins outside the old *Daily Worker* office down the road in Farringdon Road. The photographs were posted anonymously to Bertrand Russell to provide him with any direct evidence he might need if he were approached by the press—as indeed he was; it was later discovered that when the police hunt began they were buried in his garden at Plas Penrhyn in North Wales, where they may be to this day. At the same time details of the staff in RSG-4 were sent to contacts in Cambridge, in the confidence that they would be either destroyed or published in a similar way. The final task was to clear out the flats of the members of the group thoroughly to make sure that there was no physical evidence linking them with the operation in any way.

By the Thursday morning, 11 April, when the pamphlet began to arrive all over the country in the post (which was more reliable in those days), there was nothing to show who was responsible. Everything had been disposed of except the pamphlets themselves, the pamphlets had all been got rid of, and they had no fingerprints, no traceable typeface or postmark, and only their contents to help the police with their inquiries. A secret had escaped, and so—they hoped—had the Spies for Peace.

Easter 1963

There was a couple of days' grace before any public comment on the pamphlet. It arrived after Thursday's newspapers had been published, there were no newspapers on Good Friday, and the radio and television news programmes took some time to catch up with it. On Thursday, the day before the Aldermaston March began, there was much discussion of the mysterious document among members of the Nuclear Disarmament movement—and no doubt among news editors and Government officials as well. When the March began at Aldermaston, on Friday morning, many of the marchers had already received copies, and further copies were quickly distributed among them and also to reporters. Soon the police began to seize it and question people about it, but of course no one knew who was responsible. Some people had already begun to produce reprints and summaries on Thursday, more did so on Friday, and many more during the rest of the weekend, which increased both the circulation of the pamphlet and the difficulties of the police.

The details of the RSG system had been covered in a D-Notice (an

official censorship instruction to the media) only two months earlier, and the authorities answered press inquiries by attempting to suppress the story, but in vain. The news of the pamphlet was broken to the general public on Saturday morning, when it was the main item in almost all national newspapers and radio news programmes, and it dominated all comment on the Aldermaston March for the rest of the weekend.

On Saturday the March was due to pass along the A4 main road a couple of miles away from Warren Row. On Friday night several marchers explored the area, produced leaflets calling for a demonstration there, and distributed them among the marchers in Reading overnight and along the March during the next morning. On Saturday this demonstration took place, exactly as had been hoped. Several hundred marchers—led by ‘anarchists, left-wing socialists, and members of the Committee of 100’ (as reported by *Freedom*)—turned off the main road during the lunch break at Knowl Hill, despite the noisy attempts of CND marshals—led by the general secretary, Peggy Duff—to discourage them from leaving the March, made their way to Warren Row and over the fences and banks around the site, and surrounded the entrance to RSG-6 for several hours, chanting slogans and singing songs (the latter were later collected in *The RSG Song Book*). This, too, was widely reported, though the media made an elaborate business of not saying exactly where the demonstration had occurred.

The pamphlet dominated the rest of the March and helped to inspire the more radical marchers, co-ordinated by a March Must Decide Committee, in a series of diversionary activities, culminating on Easter Monday in a huge final demonstration in the West End of London — again led by anarchists, left-wing socialists, and members of the Committee of 100—which brought the weekend to a fitting climax.

Reactions and comments

The reaction of the radical wing of the Nuclear Disarmament movement, and indeed of the rank and file of the left in general, was quite as favourable as had been expected. Bertrand Russell issued a statement about the Aldermaston March on 16 April including strong praise: ‘In particular, the authors of the pamphlet published by the Spies for Peace have performed a public service.’ The Committee of 100 generally took the same line, with some qualifications about the danger of being diverted from its main activity, and its members and supporters around the country took the lead in all the following activities.

The reaction of CND was much more mixed, as had also been



"According to all the American, French, German, Russian and Chinese papers, it's at Warren Row, near Wargrave."

expected. The senior leaders—especially the chairman, L. John Collins, and Peggy Duff—were at first furious at what they saw as sabotage of the March, and only later grudgingly gave their approval. Peggy Duff said in her memoirs—*Left, Left, Left* (1971)—that 'the worst year we ever had on the march was 1963' (her account of the episode is very inaccurate). Canon Collins treated the episode differently in his memoirs—*Faith Under Fire* (1966)—by ignoring it completely. The younger leaders felt differently. The editor of the CND paper, *Sanity* (David Boulton of *Tribune*, later a prominent figure in Granada Television), naturally wished to publicise the pamphlet. In the special issue prepared on Friday and printed on Saturday for publication on Easter Sunday, the back page had an anonymous article called 'The Secret Society of War' discussing the subject in general terms, accompanied by an illustration with a caption identifying it as 'The cover picture of the secrets pamphlet, described as "the entrance to

RSG-6, seen from the road that runs through Warren Row'' This alarmed the CND officials so much that they insisted on first blacking out or cutting out the caption and then tearing out the whole page from all copies distributed. The article was reprinted without the illustration in the May issue, identified as being by Stuart Hall, and accompanied by a front-page article by David Boulton himself, giving some of the detailed information in the pamphlet; and a new illustration showed a marcher's banner with the location of RSG-6 written on it. As for the rank and file of CND, local groups played an active part in distributing reprints and summaries of the pamphlet.

The reaction of the rest of the left was similarly various. The hard Marxists said as little and as late as possible in the *Daily Worker* (Communist Party) and the *Socialist Standard* (Socialist Party of Great Britain). But the annual conference of the Independent Labour Party at the Easter weekend praised the Spies for Peace, as did the ILP *Socialist Leader*. So did the Trotskyist *Newsletter*. The anarchist paper *Freedom* was favourable, as was the syndicalist *Direct Action*. The pacifist paper *Peace News* was strongly favourable, publishing a front-page article called 'The spies were right' with a detailed account of the pamphlet and a back-page cartoon by Donald Room identifying the location of RSG-6 (19 April). The ILP youth paper *New Generation* later also gave a detailed account of the pamphlet (June).

The right-wing press was as hostile as was expected. The so-called left-wing national newspapers, the *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Herald*, were just as hostile, publishing furious condemnations respectively by Cassandra (16 April) and James Cameron (17 April)—the latter groaning, 'God save us from our friends.' *Tribune* and the *New Statesman*, and most left-wing Labour figures, were very ambivalent. The Labour Party leaders were either silent or hostile. The Conservative Home Secretary, Henry Brooke, had described the Spies for Peace as 'traitors'; the shadow Foreign Secretary, Patrick Gordon-Walker, followed by saying that 'they are spies and must be treated as such'. The right-wing journalist Chapman Pincher said in the *Daily Express* (15 April) that they should be treated 'with the same rigour as spies for war—that is, capital punishment! But when Parliament reassembled after the Easter recess on 23 April, the Prime Minister, Harold Macmillan, told the House of Commons that the whole affair had been greatly exaggerated, and the excitement began to subside.

How, and who?

The lasting effect of the episode remained to be seen, but the immediate effect was a wave of speculation about the source of the information in

the pamphlet and the identity of those responsible for it. A deliberately misleading reference in the pamphlet to 'at least *one* occupant of at least *one* RSG' was taken as seriously as had been hoped. The general assumption was that the information must have been leaked by an insider rather than discovered by outsiders, and many people involved in the RSG system were subjected to unpleasant interrogation. The undramatic truth doesn't seem to have been guessed by anyone at the time.

As for the identity of the Spies for Peace themselves, they took care to remain as undetected after their operation as before it. The group automatically disbanded when their work was done, and some took a much-needed and well-earned holiday. Most of them went on the Aldermaston March, but they had nothing to do with the production and distribution of the many reprints and summaries of the pamphlet during the Easter weekend, or with the organisation of the demonstrations at RSG-6 and the various other RSGs around the country. Four of them took part in the demonstration at Warren Row on 13 April, and enjoyed the knowledge that their plan had worked perfectly. Four of them also took part in the demonstrations in London which marked the end of the March on 15 April and were partly inspired by their example, and some of them were arrested. But it was clear that virtually no one, whether in the movement or the media or the police, was sure exactly who they were.

Nevertheless it was fairly easy to guess who they might be. Of course a few of their close colleagues knew some of their identities, and some of their many other associates had ideas which were sometimes correct—though often incorrect. As for the authorities, their views will perhaps be better known when the official records are released under the thirty-year rule in 1994—though not necessarily even then. At first, however, they clearly had no realistic ideas at all, and then they made much the same sort of guesses as anyone else. Police activity began at once, with threats and seizures and arrests and minor charges on the March, a break-in at the Committee of 100 office in London on 13 April, and interviews with possible suspects from 15 April. On 17 April members of the Special Branch raided a score of people in the London area, including the signatories of *Beyond Counting Arses*—or, rather, those they could trace—as well as some other people suspected of being involved. Nothing significant was found, and no charges were ever made. Several of the actual Spies for Peace were never raided, and indeed seem never to have been suspected; whereas many of those suspected and raided had nothing to do with the operation at all. The problem of the authorities was that, while it proved fairly easy to establish the identities of some of the people responsible for the many

reprints, it proved completely impossible to track down those responsible for the original pamphlet, and after a few weeks the official hunt died down.

Public speculation about the Spies for Peace was generally very badly informed. The defence correspondent of *The Times*, Alun Gwynne Jones (later Lord Chalfont), quoted the opinion of 'security officials' that they were 'supporters, probably communist, of nuclear disarmament' (13 April); the *Daily Express*, quoting the same sources, mentioned 'Communist agents' (15 April); and the *Daily Telegraph* referred to 'Communist subversion' (17 April); *Tribune* suggested an 'agent-provocateur' (19 April); Clare Hollingworth, the defence correspondent of the *Guardian*, went so far as to suggest 'enemy agents' (13 May). The main single suspect at the time was Peter Cadogan, secretary of the East Anglian Committee of 100 and convenor of the March Must Decide Committee (later prominent in the humanist movement); in fact he was completely innocent, and he played a valuable part in drawing off press attention for a few days. Subsidiary suspects were Philip Seed, a Committee of 100 activist who was also completely innocent, and George Clark, a prominent activist in both CND and the Committee of 100, who had led a Campaign Caravan around the country during 1962 and claimed previous knowledge of the RSG system, but who wasn't even on speaking terms with the Spies for Peace. The general public were completely bemused, going by a National Opinion Polls survey of Londoners published later in April 1963 — asked who they thought was to blame, 50 per cent said they didn't know, 1 per cent said the Committee of 100, 3 per cent the Civil Defence organisation, 4 per cent the Communists, 5 per cent CND, and 37 per cent the Government!

Speculation continued afterwards. *Peace News* drew attention to *Beyond Counting Arses* on 26 April. *The Sunday Telegraph*, which had good contacts with the security authorities and a good knowledge of the far left, suggested on 21 April that 'it would not be surprising if investigation does not bring to light a shrewd political mind directing this brilliant subversive operation', and followed on 19 May with heavy hints about a 'master mind behind the Spies for Peace', a 'Jekyll and Hyde character' who was thought to be 'a brilliant man who may be doing an important job', and so on; it was easy to see what was behind this nonsense, but nothing came of it. The Conservative Party *Campaign Guide* for the 1964 General Election implicated the Independent Labour Party; it was actually involved only to the extent that it supported the Spies for Peace and that some of its members in London and Leeds produced reprints of the pamphlet. Herb Greer's unsympathetic early history of the movement—*Mud Pie* (1964)—

carelessly asserted that the Spies for Peace were 'made up largely of Anarchists loosely attached to the Committee of 100'. Christopher Driver's sympathetic early history of the movement—*The Disarmers* (1964)—cautiously suggested that they 'might be found among the readers of the Trotskyist [sic] magazine *Solidarity*'. Richard Taylor's and Colin Pritchard's sympathetic later history—*The Protest Makers* (1980)—described them as a 'group of libertarian socialists and Anarchists', adding a note that 'it is clear that the group around the journal *Solidarity* was closely involved'. Paul Mercer's unsympathetic later history—*'Peace' of the Dead* (1986)—alleged that 'it did not take Special Branch long to identify those responsible' and that 'it was an open secret within the Committee of 100' that some members of the Syndicalist Workers Federation were involved; the authorities were actually never able to establish who was responsible, and the two named people were involved only in producing reprints and had nothing to do with the original group (indeed the named source of this story wouldn't have been trusted by anyone).

The fact is that the identity of only one member of the group has ever been publicly admitted, though a great many outsiders have claimed membership at various times. At the beginning of 1965 there was much interest in the press and amusement in the movement about a man called Trevor Jones ('Jonah'), who alleged that he was one of the Spies for Peace and had caused much disruption of official activity, but he was generally dismissed as a nuisance or a provocateur. And a much later example of confusion may be found in Alan Ryan's book *Bertrand Russell: A Political Life* (1988), which includes references to 'the activities of "Spies for Peace" (who discovered where the government's wartime communications centres were located and published the information in defiance of the Official Secrets Act)', which isn't quite right, and to 'the government's efficient use of the Official Secrets Act to send the most determined Spies for Peace to jail for eighteen months', which is quite wrong. The essential point to emphasise is that, by taking simple precautions, the Spies for Peace made sure that there was no material evidence against anyone, so that no one was arrested, let alone imprisoned.

Effects and results

The original pamphlet, which appeared just before Easter 1963, was followed by a literally incalculable number of reprints and summaries produced by various groups and individuals over the Easter weekend and then during the next few weeks. There were certainly at least a hundred separate versions, most duplicated but a few surreptitiously

printed. It was estimated that about 10,000 pamphlets and about 30,000 leaflets summarising the pamphlet had been distributed by the end of the March, on Easter Monday, and Vanessa Redgrave's speech at the closing rally in Hyde Park that afternoon repeated its main contents.

The largest known edition was a printed version which was produced in London on 22 April in a run of 18,000 copies. (This was one of several which expurgated the remarks about the Cuba crisis to say that 'damn all' or 'nothing at all' was done.) One summary was distributed at the annual conference of the National Union of Students at Keele University during the weekend after Easter by Martin Loney, then a student leader (and later general secretary of the National Council for Civil Liberties and then an academic sociologist). A particularly interesting version appeared in the French left-wing paper *France Observateur* on 18 April. The story filled the front and back pages, with the comment: 'Treason ceased to be treason when it became a public service. The boldness of the Spies for Peace has promoted the peace march from the level of British folklore into an event of international significance'; and the two middle pages were filled with facsimiles of the pamphlet. (The issue was banned in Britain.) Copies of the pamphlet soon travelled further afield, and by June versions were being produced as far apart as Australia, New Zealand and the United States. Also in June the London Committee of 100 began producing a series of duplicated editions which it sold at one shilling, and various other versions continued to appear for the rest of the year.

In exactly the same way, the demonstration at RSG-6 on 13 April was followed by demonstrations organised by local Nuclear Disarmament groups at almost every other known RSG in the country on almost every weekend during the next couple of months. As had been hoped, the Committee of 100 and indeed the radical wing of the movement in general took on a new lease of life.

All these events were reported in the press much more widely than had ever been hoped. No doubt this was partly because of their intrinsic interest; but it was much more because the press during that period bore a bitter grudge against the Government—following the imprisonment in February of two reporters for refusing to disclose (non-existent) sources of information for (imaginary) stories about the Vassall spy case to an official tribunal, and the denial in March by the Minister of War, John Profumo, of rumours about his relationship with Christine Keeler which everyone in Fleet Street knew to be true (the resulting sex-and-politics scandal revolving around Stephen Ward dominated the political scene for the rest of the summer). All the capitalist newspapers wanted the Spies for Peace to be caught and punished; but meanwhile

they were delighted to be able to embarrass the Government from a new angle.

Despite specific police threats, detailed accounts of the pamphlets and the demonstrations appeared in some papers of the libertarian left. What was more surprising and significant was that, despite official and unofficial pressure and all the political implications, the *Daily Telegraph* finally broke ranks in the Establishment—by printing on 19 April what was alleged to be the transcript of a programme broadcast by Radio Prague the previous day, including substantial quotations from the Spies for Peace pamphlet. On the same day *Private Eye* published a full-page parody of the pamphlet—with the title 'Top Secret: Do not read this page' and spoof details of 'Holes in the Ground' (HIGs)—and on the next day the pamphlet was shown and discussed on the television programme *That Was The Week That Was*. And the case was used as the theme of an episode in the Granada Television serial *The Odd Man* (Edward Boyd's 'The Betrayal of Ambrose Leech'), broadcast on Independent Television on 17 May. The Spies for Peace had entered the folklore of political culture—and not only in Britain. The pamphlets and demonstrations were praised by the Situationist movement on the Continent as an exemplary instance of the destruction of spectacle and creation of situations, made the subject of an art exhibition called 'The Destruction of the RSG-6' held in Odense, Denmark, during June and July 1963, and held up as a model for further revolutionary action—which they were.

Developments

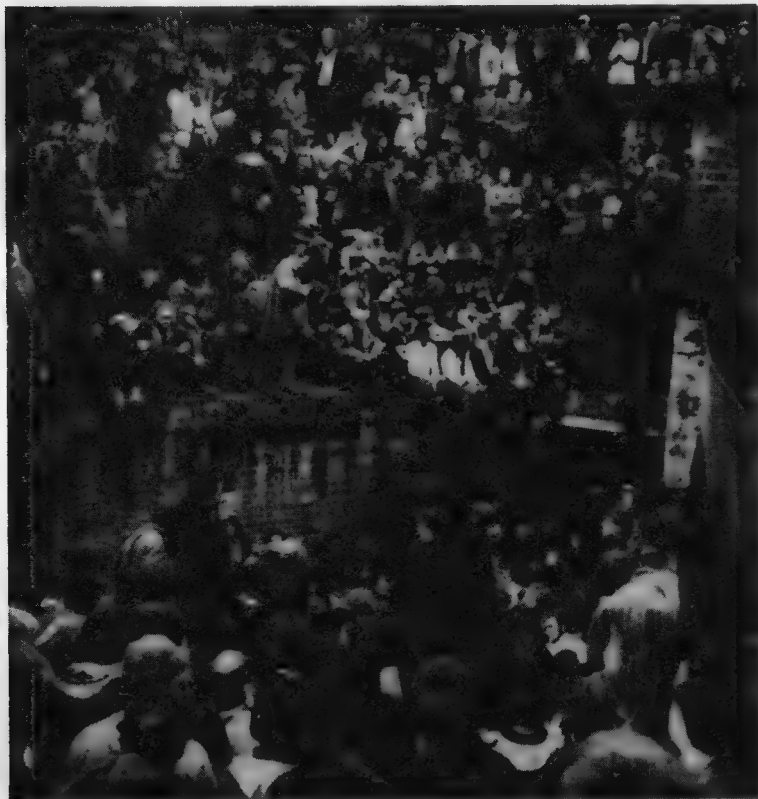
But the important thing was how the situation would develop in practice. Soon the ripples began to spread as the lessons sank in. The information about RSG-4, which had been sent to contacts in Cambridge, was published in a similar though much shorter pamphlet on 25 April. On 2 May a typed leaflet appeared stating that the communications system connecting the RSGs and the central Government was located in underground bunkers near Chancery Lane underground station in London, with surface entrances in Fournival Street and High Holborn. At the same time secret telephone numbers and addresses were being passed round by word of mouth, and for several weeks members of the Nuclear Disarmament movement used them to harass and, if possible, to disrupt the communications system.

One unfortunate episode occurred after the demonstration at RSG-12 in Dover Castle on 5 May. Local activists broke in to the site and discovered further secret papers about the RSG system. However, lacking confidence in their own ability to make use of the material and

knowledge of who else might be able to do so, they handed the papers over to the secretary of the National Committee of 100 and the editor of *Peace News*—both of whom had expressed support for the Spies for Peace at Easter. But these two leading figures in the anti-war movement not only destroyed the material but even rebuked those responsible for this skilful and entirely successful action, so a valuable opportunity was wasted.

The Spies for Peace episode and work continued to be the subject of both private and public discussion during summer 1963. In June the text of *Beyond Counting Arses* was reprinted by *Solidarity* (Volume 2, Number 11) to provide documentation for this discussion. Also in June a pamphlet with the acronymic title *Resistance Shall Grow* was published by a coalition of groups in the libertarian left—the Independent Labour Party, the London Federation of Anarchists, *Solidarity*, the Syndicalist Workers Federation, and a section of the London Committee of 100—and was also included in *Anarchy* 29 as ‘The Spies for Peace Story’. Subtitled ‘The Story of the Spies for Peace and Why They are Important For Your Future’, this compilation of anonymous articles described the events of Easter 1963 and the various repercussions, with particular attention to the reactions of the authorities, the media and the orthodox left, and with the hopeful conclusion that the episode might be ‘the basis of a genuinely revolutionary mass movement’.

In September Nicolas Walter’s *The RSGs, 1919-1963* was published as *Solidarity* Pamphlet 15 to fill in the historical background of the emergency regional government system since the First World War (though he didn’t go back as far as its slightly earlier origins during the First World War). One interesting point to emerge was that the revived RSG system had not only been fairly widely known for some time but had actually been discussed openly in the press on several occasions and described in some detail in the *Daily Mail* in February 1961; indeed Bertrand Russell himself had drawn attention to its significance (in a speech to the Midlands Conference for Peace in Birmingham on 11 March 1961, reprinted as the pamphlet *Win We Must*). By this time, the authorities, having failed to lay their hands on the Spies for Peace, drew a practical lesson from them instead, and also in September an official report on Civil Defence gave detailed information about the RSG system to the general public for the first time. Already the structure had been modified to provide for the likely dismemberment of the regions by nuclear attack and the establishment instead of Sub-Regional controls (as reported by *Sanity* in August), and soon the Civil Defence structure was completely dismantled, though a skeleton system survived. In a way, then, the Spies for Peace succeeded completely.



The story of

the 'Spies for Peace'

and why they are

important for your future

RESISTANCE

SHALL

GROW...

6^d



Revival and failure

But the Spies for Peace had aimed at something much more than merely discrediting or even destroying the Civil Defence system, and by the autumn of 1963 they resumed their work. The group had kept constantly in touch, and had also remained active in other ways. Members were among the representatives of the Nuclear Disarmament movement who confronted Bernard Levin with the pamphlet on *That Was The Week That Was* on 20 April, and among the hecklers at the public meeting organised by the London Region of CND on 28 April when leaders of the Nuclear Disarmament movement offered their

belated approval to the Spies for Peace (and made an idiotic appeal to give themselves up!). Several members took part in the Committee of 100 demonstrations during the summer at Marham (in May) and Porton (in June), during Greek Week (in July) and the subsequent Committee convoy to Greece, as well as in the Cuban Embassy demonstration (in July) and the Notting Hill anti-eviction struggle (in August). But, when the London Committee once more relapsed into the same paralysis as had afflicted it before Easter, the group was re-formed at the end of August.

At this point two members dropped out of any further activity, and two new members were brought in to replace them. At various times during the following period other people took part in specific activities on a temporary basis, and there was a growing network of contacts in several parts of the country, but the hard core remained almost unchanged.

The aim of the Spies for Peace remained the same; but now their task was more difficult. It would not be sufficient to repeat their work; it was necessary to move forward and do better than before. They had discovered and exposed the emergency regional government system; now they set out to discover and expose the emergency central government system behind it. They had acquired the essential trust in each other and the basic expertise and experience for this kind of activity; but they were determined not to take any unnecessary risks, which limited their freedom of action. So once more they withdrew from other activities and resumed work.

The first area to be explored was the deep shelters in London which had been constructed during the Second World War. Papers found in Warren Row had shown that the RSG-system had not been activated during the Cuba crisis in October 1962, a few weeks after the Fallex 62 exercise which proved the uselessness of the whole system. The group decided to see what been done with the deep shelters, and they picked on the one near Belsize Park underground station as being the easiest to break into without risk of detection. The shelter was raided on 28 September 1963, and they discovered that it not only had been unused during the Cuba crisis but was unusable at any time, since its fittings were all either dismantled or derelict. But nothing much could be made of that on its own.

The next area to be explored was the enormous military complex near Corsham, just east of Bath on the main London-Bristol road and railway. Contacts at the CND annual conference in October reported local suspicions that this was the site of the emergency central seat of government, and this coincided with hints in the press that in a war the Government would go underground 'somewhere in the West'. The

group decided to see what could be discovered. A preliminary visit was made in November, and two thorough searches were made during December. The whole area was combed, and several installations were broken into; but the group found it impossible to get far enough into the complex to confirm their strong suspicions about it without taking excessive risks, and the operation was temporarily suspended.

Instead the group turned to the London communications system near Chancery Lane underground station. Attempts were made to break into various places during January 1964, but again they found it impossible to penetrate the system without more drastic measures. At several meetings the group discussed—both alone and with sympathetic contacts—the possibility of cracking the system in other ways, whether by planning a public demonstration to draw attention to it and trying to get in during a diversion, or else by mounting a more determined assault altogether. But in the end it was decided to proceed no further because the operation seemed unlikely to succeed without taking unnecessary risks or using undesirable methods.

Another visit was made to the West Country in February, this time in the area of the Mendips, where other contacts had suggested the central seat of government might be located. A long search ended with the discovery of a mysterious site at Temple Cloud, but when this was raided it turned out to be only a Home Office Supply and Transport Store. A great deal of equipment was found in it, but no important papers. Yet another visit was made to the West Country in May, but again nothing was discovered.

By this time attention had been turned elsewhere, as a result of independent work by another group active in East London. In March 1964 the Ilford Civil Defence headquarters was broken into, and some of the papers found there were passed on to the Spies for Peace. References were found to a site near Kelvedon Hatch in Essex which sounded interesting. The site was located after a short search, and was broken into on 29 March, Easter Sunday, at the time of the Easter March. Kelvedon Hatch turned out to be an intriguing place, since it combined a Sub-Regional headquarters in the RSG system with a Group headquarters in the Royal Observer Corps system. A great deal of material was removed from the huge bunkers at Kelvedon Hatch, and much of it was found to be interesting; but most of it related to the ROC structure and its exercises, which were hardly worth the trouble of exposing.

One particularly significant item of information that did emerge was that the London Region, whose RSG was strangely missing from the material found in Warren Row, had apparently been eliminated from the system altogether, and divided up between the Eastern, Southern and

South-Eastern regions, so that London was to be ruled by Regional Commissioners in Cambridge, Warren Row and Dover; the various sectors of the capital were to be administered from several Sub-Regional headquarters, of which Kelvedon Hatch was the one for East London north of the Thames. The implication was that in the event of nuclear war London would be virtually abandoned to its fate—but this was no news for anyone who had read the original Spies for Peace pamphlet, and again it was not worth the trouble of exposing on its own.

Further developments in East London put an end to work in that area. In May the Wanstead Civil Defence headquarters was broken into. In August three people were arrested and charged with the Ilford and Wanstead break-ins. There was some dramatic publicity for a time, with heavy hints about the identity of the Spies for Peace, but in the event the magistrates court proceedings were confined to events in East London and the wider implications were obscured. The defendants were given large fines, which were soon raised by sympathisers.

Another area again was Wales, where contacts pointed out suspicious sites in various parts of the country. Visits were made several times during the spring and summer of 1964, large areas were explored, and some sites were examined; but no hard information was ever obtained.

On 16 and 17 October 1964, during the weekend after General Election which brought the Labour Party back to power after thirteen years, two final visits were made to the Corsham complex, and the most determined efforts so far were made to break into appropriate sites. But yet again the task proved impossible, and the operation had to be terminated once and for all. This marked the end of the activity of the Spies for Peace as a group.

Scots Against War

During all this time a parallel but completely independent response to the situation in the Committee of 100 had taken place in Scotland. Some Glasgow activists who had attended the Way Ahead conference in February 1963 were impressed by the arguments of *Beyond Counting Arses*, and developed their ideas in a similar way.

The first public indication of this phenomenon was the appearance at the Holy Loch demonstration on 25 May 1963 of a duplicated leaflet called *How to disrupt, obstruct and subvert the Warfare State*, and signed 'Scots Against War'. This was followed by an irregular series of publications over the next couple of years, aimed at stimulating radical activity in the Scottish Nuclear Disarmament movement.

This activity was not confined to argument, and sabotage became frequent and widespread from 1963 to 1966. Several fires were started

at the Holy Loch and Faslane bases, and many Civil Defence and Army offices all over the country were broken into and wrecked. Occasionally some individuals were arrested, but the authorities generally preferred to keep things quiet. Few charges were brought, and only fines were ever imposed. The Scots Against War group was never broken, but in the end it faded away.

In June 1966 the Scottish Solidarity group published as its first pamphlet *A Way Ahead*, which was a collection of articles by and about the Scots Against War and the sabotage issue printed in both Scotland and London, with editorial comments. The subtitle was 'For a New Peace Movement', but the pamphlet actually marked the end of the old one. Nevertheless, the career of the Scots Against War, inspired by the same ideas as the Spies for Peace (and frequently in informal contact with them), may be seen as one of the most successful practical assaults on the military system mounted by the whole Nuclear Disarmament movement.

Last things

The individual Spies for Peace remained active after the end of their work as a group. During 1964 they had already joined the picnic at Warren Row on 16 August. Following the successful pirate radio broadcasts during the General Election of October 1964 in South London, they joined a new group of Radio Pirates which set out to combine old methods of gathering information with new methods of distributing it. But they left the group before its first (and last) broadcasts at Easter 1965. The theme of the messages was to be the secret Civil Defence plans for London, and some of the material accumulated by the Spies for Peace was used in preparing the texts. But the treatment was sensationalised and the organisational and technical defects of the group were such that it soon collapsed. Despite this failure to revive the work of the Voice of Nuclear Disarmament, the Spies for Peace joined the demonstration at the end of the 1965 Easter March called for by the broadcasts (whose texts were distributed in pamphlet form). This was at the Rotundas in Monck Street, Westminster, which were suspected of being the site of the London RSG (if any) or even of the emergency seat of government — and where there had also been a demonstration at the end of the Easter March in 1964.

After this the individual members of the group were involved in several appropriate activities. Some helped to produce the fake American dollars bearing slogans against the Vietnam War during 1966 and 1967. Several took part in the Brighton Church demonstration in October 1966. Contacts were involved in the springing of George Blake

from Wormwood Scrubs in October 1966. Several took part in the Greek Embassy demonstration in April 1967. Some joined the Committee of 100 demonstrations at the Corsham complex during 1967. And several were involved in the housing struggles which became the Squatters movement in 1969.

At one stage tenuous connections were made with a new tendency on the libertarian left. One of the contacts of the Spies for Peace, who had been prominent in the Radio Pirates, was involved in an attempt to fire a harmless rocket at the Greek Embassy in 1967; the attempt was a fiasco, but also a portent of things to come. And after the first shooting at the American Embassy in August 1967, the police raids of Committee of 100 militants involved a few members of the Spies for Peace. None of the group was in fact involved in the later developments culminating in 1970-1971 in the Angry Brigade, but these connections were not entirely coincidental.

In 1968 some of the Spies for Peace joined the Aldermaston March on the Easter Saturday to take part in a YCND demonstration at Warren Row. This commemorated their success five years earlier; but it also marked their failure to achieve any further success, and indeed the failure of the first Nuclear Disarmament movement as a whole—for that was the last of the first series of Aldermaston Marches, and 1968 also saw the disbandment of the Committee of 100 and its replacement as the vanguard of the radical left by the new student movement and the campaign against the Vietnam War. Some of the Spies for Peace continued political activity for many years, and a few were involved in the revived Nuclear Disarmament movement of the 1980s, but by that time they had long ceased to have any corporate existence.

Epilogue

One of the main successes of the Spies for Peace was the complete absorption into the public consciousness of the information they revealed. This was shown in 1965 when Peter Watkins made *The War Game*, a television film about the effects of a nuclear war which turned out to be so convincing that the authorities put pressure on the BBC not to broadcast it. Its picture of the political system which would be operated during a nuclear war took for granted the RSG system described by the Spies for Peace, although this had actually been radically altered by then. (It was shown in cinemas at the time and then to peace groups all over the country for twenty years, until it was at last broadcast in July 1985.)

Another success was the general assumption that further information of the same kind should be distributed as widely as possible, and quite

soon this began to happen quite openly. Peter Laurie wrote a long article on the emergency government system in the *Sunday Times Magazine* (10 December 1967), and then expanded it into a frequently revised book, *Beneath the City Streets* (1970, 1972, 1979, 1983). Further information appeared in Tony Bunyan's book, *The Political Police in Britain* (1976, 1977), and also in several pamphlets—such as *London: The Other Underground* (1974) by 'Anarchists Anonymous', *Region 1* (1978) by Martin Spence, and *Review of Security and the State* (1979) by 'State Research'.

During the following decade the field was taken over by Duncan Campbell. He first became well known as one of the three defendants in the ABC trial of 1977-1978 (which concerned the SIGINT system), who were found guilty of breaches of the Official Secrets Act but were neither fined nor imprisoned. He then turned to the emergency government system. Articles in *Time Out* (21/27 March 1980) and the *New Statesman* (2 October 1981) were followed by a 500-page book, *War Plan UK* (1982, 1983). This is a very detailed study of 'The Truth About Civil Defence in Britain' from the beginnings of the system during the First World War up to its reorganisation during the 1970s and the exercises testing it during the early 1980s. Campbell was able not only to work (almost) completely in the open, but also to use the work of a great many other people (including some of the Spies for Peace). He later produced another book, *The Unsinkable Aircraft Carrier* (1984, 1986), a similarly detailed account of 'American Military Power in Britain'. His work may be said to have completed that begun by the Spies for Peace after a quarter of a century, so that the British people now have all the necessary information about their fate at the hands of the state in a military—or civil—emergency.

Note

All accounts of the Spies for Peace by outsiders have been vitiated by lack of knowledge of what really happened. The only previous accounts based on such knowledge were articles published in the *Guardian* (9 April 1966)—and reprinted as a leaflet, *The Spies for Peace: Their Story Told at Last*—and in *Inside Story* 8 and 9 (March/April and May/June 1973), of which the present account is a revised and expanded version.

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